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Getting Along

In "Why We Can't All Just Get Along" (February), Stanley Fish sets out to persuade people "of religious conviction" that we cannot be liberals—that we cannot subscribe to a regime of equal rights and freedom of speech and conscience. He says we should want to "shut down" the marketplace of ideas and "silence" our "atheistic opponents." To be true to our faith, we must be theocrats.

I suspect Fish is less interested in persuading religious Americans to be intolerant than he is in persuading nonreligious Americans that the religious *are* intolerant. If Fish is right that religious Americans inherently must be intolerant, that would serve as an excuse for refusing to tolerate *them*. That, presumably, is the rationale for his peculiar essay.

In any event, the argument is bogus. There is no philosophical incompatibility between believing in truth (and believing that this truth is relevant to issues of justice and the common good) and believing that disagreement in a republic of free and equal citizens should be resolved by deliberation rather than force.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that liberalism is not a coherent comprehensive philosophy of life. It is a prescription for government. As a comprehensive philosophy, it quickly collapses into self-contradiction. If liberalism really meant what Fish says it means ("a continual pushing away of orthodoxies, of beliefs not open to inquiry and correction") then it would end up pushing itself away, for its strictures against orthodoxy would apply with as much force to itself as to any other belief system. Fish calls this a "debater's point," but it is more than that. It is a demonstration that, on its own terms, liberalism understood as a comprehensive worldview is self-contradictory.

Constitutional liberalism—which is the only liberalism that truly exists and makes sense—is not based on the denial of the possibility of truth, but on restricting the force to resolve competing claims of truth. It takes no stance on the epistemology or theology of citizens, but limits the jurisdiction of government. In a liberal society, citizens are free to advocate whatever positions and worldviews they find persuasive (religious or nonreligious), on an equal basis. They may not, however, use force (governmental power) to impose their understanding of truth on their unpersuaded fellow citizens.

Constitutional liberalism is based not on skepticism about truth but on skepticism about government. To empower government to coerce belief is to invite coercion into error. Contrary to Fish, *New York Times v. Sullivan* did not devalue truth. It recognized that governments (specifically, common law juries) are an unreliable instrument for determining truth—that those holding the power of coercion will be tempted to use that power in the service of self-interest and ideology. Better to leave determinations about truth to the diffuse and decentralized authority of individual conscience—and, as to questions of justice and the common good, to public opinion expressed through representative institutions.

Far from being incompatible with Christianity, this argument for liberalism was originally developed largely by Protestant Christians, who were the first to proclaim that "God Alone Is Lord of the Conscience." Coerced faith, they argued, is a contradiction in terms. The attempt by earthly authorities to control the relationship of the believer to the truth is not only pointless, but blasphemous. It is an impious usurpation of the role and function of the Holy Spirit. A Christian does not want to "extirpate" liberalism "root and branch," as Fish asserts, because it is *only* under conditions of freedom that genuine conversion and worship can take place. Indeed, a religious believer feels no more need or desire to "shut down" the marketplace of ideas than anyone else who is convinced of the persuasive power of the truth. The believer is confident that a full and fair consideration of the evidence can only promote his cause. Error may need the power of state coercion, but truth, never.

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Does Fish really believe that our liberal republic is inhabited largely by citizens who "bracket" all "value questions" in the course of their deliberations over justice and the common good? If so, he has been listening to different public discourse than I have heard. Feminists, environmentalists, libertarians, opponents and proponents of abortion rights, utilitarians, civil rights organizations, peace groups, and virtually everyone else with a coherent position in American politics advocate public policy from a committed stance, based on the "truth" about "value questions." That does not mean that all of these groups would want to shut down the marketplace of ideas: on the contrary, with some notable exceptions, most citizens are committed to their vision of the truth within the context of a liberal democratic regime. The reason why we *can* "all get along," most of the time, is that we are committed to the use of persuasion rather than force.

In evident contrast to Fish, most Americans know that it is possible to believe in truth and freedom at the same time. Most ask only that they be permitted equal access to the public debate, and they accept the process of representative democracy as a legitimate basis for collective action. This does not mean that they think the majority *is right*, but that they think a majority of their fellow citizens *have the right*, within constitutionally prescribed limits, to act on the basis of arguments that they find persuasive. It would not occur to most Americans that it would be just or fair to exclude anyone, on the basis of their religious faith or lack of it, from equal rights of participation in public deliberation. The suggestion that religious citizens "should want" to impose a theocracy lies somewhere between a misunderstanding and a canard.

Michael W. McConnell
School of Law
University of Chicago
Chicago, IL

Stanley Fish is known for his view that interpreters, in effect, create their own authors and texts; so, true to form, he has created George Marsden to suit his rhetorical purposes. I am particularly astonished that he suggests that *The Soul of the American University* does not exemplify the type of scholarship that it advocates. I should think that one who recognizes, as Fish does, the pervasive influence of first principles would see that every page of that work is shaped by questions that reflect my Christian commitments. The book is, as Fish acknowledges, an extended critique of liberal culture, yet he insists that liberalism itself is my ultimate allegiance. The fact that I try to be fair and civil should hardly count as evidence that I have abandoned Christian principles.

Fish bases his construction on a logical error or a rhetorical sleight of hand. He correctly argues that liberal culture is based on prior assumptions about reality. He then shifts to a conclusion, however, that seems to rest on the assumption that any endorsement of some of the particulars of a liberal polity must entail an endorsement of the whole system, including its presuppositions.

Christians should want to affirm some aspects of liberal culture as relative goods, without making that culture ultimate. They might even want to participate in it enough to try to change some of its rules, as I do with respect to the mainstream academic culture's view of religious perspectives. Such participation, however, does not imply that one is ultimately a liberal any more than a Christian's playing by the rules of basketball, or trying to change the three-point line, implies that basketball is one's first allegiance.

Fish's confusing of this sort of distinction leads to his misinterpretation of one of my arguments. I do not say that since there are no standards for truth Christianity should be accepted as intellectually as good as the next thing. Rather I say that because the *mainstream academy* lacks universal standards for truth, it is not in a good position to marginalize traditional religious perspectives on the old scientistic grounds that such perspectives have failed to meet some objective standards to which all educated people should assent.

Fish, for the purposes of his argument (which has the effect of discrediting all but fundamentalist Christian options), borrows a Reformed epistemology similar to my own. He then, however, makes a move much like the theonomists do with the views of my mentor Cornelius Van Til. They insist that the only consistent Christian position is an Old Testament stance of all-out cultural warfare between those committed to God and the hosts of Satan. So any consorting with liberalism is a sellout. My view, I think, is closer to the New Testament and Augustinian view of dual citizenship in which allegiance to the Kingdom of God is by far the ultimate one.

George Marsden
Department of History
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, IN

Anyone fond of the game "What's wrong with this picture?" should make it a habit to read Stanley Fish on dull afternoons. Few controversialists are able to present such outrageous claims and arguments quite so winningly. The challenge is to extract the nihilistic marrow of his performances from the reasonable-sounding rhetoric that surrounds them like so much watercress. For of course the man who has assured us that "there is no such thing as intrinsic merit" and who has proclaimed, with Jacques Derrida, that we have no extra-linguistic access to truth or reality *is* a nihilist, however puckish. "Why We Can't All Just Get Along" is a classic Fish story, from its pose of concerned engagement with vital existential questions to its dark or even (as Professor Fish himself repeatedly suggests) Satanic implications for the idea of religious truth.

Professor Fish cuts a broad swath in this essay. Sometimes, it is true, he flirts with the merely preposterous, as when he writes that "Adhering to the convention [!] that two plus two equals four is like adhering to the convention that we drive on the right side of the road or to the convention that red means stop and green means go." But his main enemy, as usual, is

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the idea that there exists a reality that transcends our efforts to grasp it but that nonetheless exercises legitimate claims on us. Professor Fish made a name for himself attacking the reality of literary experience. (In a way, his entire position is summed up in the title of one of his best-known books, *Is There a Text in This Class?*) Now, after a stint attacking the conviction that law bears any relation to the ideal of justice, he has moved on to religion.

What is most clever, and also most devious, about Professor Fish's procedure is the way that he plays on the widespread fear of being called antiliberal. Professor Fish knows that there is an essential hollowness at the core of liberalism; he knows that most academic intellectuals are reluctant to face up to this (hence his deft dissection of Stephen Carter, George Marsden, and Michael McConnell); and he knows that opposing religion to liberalism in the most categorical way possible is certain to send many of his opponents running into the arms of embarrassed equivocation.

But the real issue concerns not liberalism but the reality and status of self-justifying experiences. Professor Fish writes that "no sign can deliver up the norm by which to judge its own adequacy or significance." There is a crucial sleight of hand here. For in the experiences that touch us most deeply—experiences of love, of great art, of religion—the question of "norms," "evidence," and the like only arises in the aftermath of experience. This was something that Plato, for example, recognized when he made "recollection"—an extra-linguistic, self-justifying intuition—the foundation of knowledge. And it explains why aesthetic experience, to take another example, has so often been described as "self-justifying." *Pace* Stanley Fish, such experience does carry the patent of its own adequacy with it: not in terms of reasons or arguments, but in terms of the unshakable conviction it engenders.

The model for such experience is of course fundamentally religious. (Which indeed is why art and religion are as often rivals as collaborators: "Beauty," as Dostoyevsky put it, "is the battleground on which God and the Devil battle for man's soul.") Professor Fish wishes to equip all experience with a quotient of skepticism. But religion, as the philosopher Leszek Kolakowski has argued, "is not a set of propositions, it is the realm of worship wherein understanding, knowledge, the feeling of participation in the ultimate reality, . . . and moral commitment appear as a single act, whose subsequent segregation into separate classes of metaphysical, moral, and other assertions might be useful but is bound to distort the sense of the original."

It is no doubt appropriate that Milton's Satan, with his dream of being "self-begot, self-rais'd," should emerge as the hero of Professor Fish's essay. Satan's is an infatuating—and self-infatuating—fantasy. But, as Milton pointed out, his antihero experienced certain difficulties acknowledging any truth or reality outside himself. This led to various unpleasant consequences, not least in his ability to get along.

Roger Kimball
New Criterion
New York, NY

Stanley Fish uses a contrast between Satan's and Adam's first premises and ways of knowing in *Paradise Lost* as the basis of his argument. Richard John Neuhaus ("Why We Can Get Along," February) answers Professor Fish's arguments quite well, and I do not wish to elaborate on that answer here. What I do want to do is point out that Professor Fish's own first premise is based on a lie—Satan's lie, I hasten to add.

Although Professor Fish discusses Satan's various statements about the nature of his being and origin, taking these statements as Satan's fundamental assumptions, he avoids mentioning Satan's prolonged soliloquy in Book IV, in which Satan acknowledges that he knows better:

> Ah, wherefore! he [God]
> deserv'd no such return
> From me, whom he created
> what I was
> In that bright eminence, and
> with his good
> Upbraided none; nor was his
> service hard,
> What could be less than to
> afford him praise,
> The easiest recompense, and
> pay him thanks,
> How due! yet all his good
> prov'd ill in me,
> And wrought but malice; lifted
> up so high
> I 'sdain'd subjection, and
> thought one step higher
> Would set me highest, and in a
> moment quit
> The debt immense of endless
> gratitude,
> So burdensome, still owing,
> still to owe;
> Forgetful what from him I still
> receiv'd,
> And understood not that a
> grateful mind
> By owing owes not, but still
> pays, at once
> Indebted and discharg'd; what
> burden then?
>
> (IV.42-57)

Here Satan acknowledges that God has created him; and although he claims he once "thought" he might surpass God, "understood not" the nature of gratitude, and was "forgetful" of God's continuous holding him in being, these are equivocations. He knows now, and if Milton indeed held the prevailing idea of angels' instantaneous and intuitive knowledge (a point subject to debate, of course), what he knows now he has always known. At any rate, by using the past tense, Satan indicates that he now does hold as a "first premise" the fact of his creation by God and his true relationship to God.

The "forgetfulness" he claims, furthermore, is an inaccurate term on Satan's part. The more accurate term would be "refusal to acknowledge." Significantly, Professor Fish also cites Mammon as starting from a similar ignorance of the truth as Satan's; but in Milton's description of Mammon in Book II, we learn that

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even while Mammon was surrounded by hard evidence of all the splendors of God, he has always ignored it rather than been ignorant of it:

> . . . for ev'n in Heav'n his looks and thought
> Were always downward bent, admiring more
> The riches of Heav'n's pavement, trodd'n Gold,
> Than aught divine or holy else enjoy'd
> in vision beatific.
>
> (II.680-84)

In fact, Milton makes a repeated point throughout *Paradise Lost* that all the thinking creatures of God (man and angels) have been given enough information to know the truth and act upon it, and their acceptance or rejection of what they know—not what their first premises are—is what they are judged on. Again, Milton's views on predestination and free will are subject to continual scholarly debate, but even Calvin had maintained that the reprobate are culpable although predestined, because they have seen the light and turned away from it.

In a particularly ironic section of Book II, when the subordinate demons are attempting to amuse themselves in Hell after Satan's departure for God's newest creation, those who take up philosophy condemn themselves to pointless conversation because—again—they have determined to leave the one fact out of the discussion that would make any sense of it, that is, God:

> Others apart sat on a Hill retir'd,
> In thoughts more elevate, and reason'd high
> Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate,
> Fixt Fate, Free will, Foreknowledge absolute,
> And found no end, in wand'ring mazes lost.
>
> (II.557-61)

The "wand'ring mazes," then, appear to be a precursor of deconstructionism: an attempt to deny the existence of a reality outside the self, and at the same time to insist on the reality of the self who is doing the denying and the audience who is reading the denial; an attempt to deny the possibility of communication but to deny it through the medium of communication; an attempt to claim that no one can understand anyone else's ideas, while expecting everyone to understand one's own ideas and (as Professor Fish obviously expects in his defense of his scholarly reputation) to be honored for one's own ability to understand; and above all, an attempt to evade responsibility for one's own actions. Like Satan, like Mammon, one "forgets" conveniently and looks away from what interferes with one's appetites; and then, like the demons in Milton's Hell, one complains—or points out triumphantly—that we somehow always wind up "in wand'ring mazes lost."

Phoebe S. Spinrad
Department of English
Ohio State University
Columbus, OH

The exchange between Stanley Fish and Richard John Neuhaus is an important one. Fish makes an argument that many of us in the religious camp could sympathize with—up to a point. When talking with pro-choice people, for example, you sometimes realize that your first premises are so totally alien one from the other that the arguments pass without contact. One sees life as given, implying a giver, implying that the human community is not the source of value and valuing but rather the community of those whose work it is to learn what the valuing means. The other side sees the value of life as something determined in the face of an unmeaning universe, by a consensus of those who will or will not come to a common view of who it is that matters to the community, and who does not, and why they matter and do not matter. It is hard to see how we can agree.

But Fish argues that the religious argument must desire the simple extermination of the other. He assumes that persuasion is the equivalent of Mill's open marketplace of ideas. However, something else has been at work since the beginning of Christianity. (See the apologists, especially Justin.) Neuhaus argues for a larger world, in which persuasion is possible and no one needs to assume the flattening of the opponent or the absolute incommensurability of different arguments.

And there is evidence for Neuhaus' view. Fish's account of our ways of not communicating does not take into account the phenomenon of conversion. Experience of some sort has led atheists to belief, and believers to atheism. Persuasion that one's first principles were wrong is frequently part of this phenomenon. It could be argued that Saul becomes Paul because the chess board is replaced suddenly by a backgammon board, but for many the experience is gradual, an experience of slow persuasion. One friend of mine said that he went from agnosticism to belief, largely through a serious reading of Plato, and is now a Christian. This sort of movement is something Fish's approach does not account for, and Neuhaus' does.

John Garvey
Bayside, NY

Stanley Fish and Richard John Neuhaus can get along by splitting their difference, because "getting along" need not be a reciprocal relation.

Since our thought is circumscribed by our faith commitments, a lesser faith doesn't have eyes to see a greater faith. Those whose thought is grounded in something less than that "than which nothing greater can be conceived" are blind to the fullness of truth.

Tolerance is only an option to those who recognize something of value in another. Because we theists at least recognize the dignity of the person created in the image of God, we always have something with which to build a bridge to our fellow human beings. Nontheists have no necessary way of relating to others.

Thus we theists can get along with nontheists, but they can't get along with us. If nontheists control the

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public square, they will contrive to push theists out.

Ralph Gillmann
Burke, VA

After the contentious Professor Fish, how calming it is to read Father Neuhaus' assurance that the most important reason religious coercion lost was that "Christians recognized it is incompatible with what they believe as Christians."

But is that what really happened? Hasn't Father Neuhaus credited modern Christianity with liberalism's premier accomplishment?

Yes, he does make passing reference to it being "the will of God that we not kill one another over our disagreements about the will of God." But except for a handful of Anabaptists and Quakers, Christians of this millennium have found it all too easy to find exceptions to the divine proscription. . . .

Berry Friesen
Lancaster, PA

That I found many of Professor Fish's arguments persuasive came as a surprise as I'm clearly a member of a side with which he presumably believes he can't get along. Does this prove he's mistaken? That the exchange provokes such seemingly paradoxical questions is simply additional evidence of its worth. My only criticism is that we were never told exactly what was meant by the phrase "get along." I was troubled, and my response reminded me that I'd encountered this issue before.

I'm a student and admirer of the historian and political philosopher Eric Voegelin. . . . Voegelin argues that debate between those disagreeing over first principles is still possible in the areas of logic and the natural sciences. However, Professor Fish and Voegelin are in agreement that true debate regarding issues central to the human person is impossible. Voegelin refers to Max Scheler's distinction of *personperiphere* and *personzentrale* areas, issues involving the former being debatable while issues involving the latter are not. Although troubled by this conclusion, I believe it to be correct.

On the other hand, Voegelin would also agree with Neuhaus that the Christian philosopher cannot remain passive—cannot choose to *not* "get along"—but has a moral obligation to confront the perceived falsehoods of opponents. It's of the very essence of the philosophical enterprise. According to Aquinas, "as it is incumbent on the *sapiens* to meditate on the truth of the first principle, and to communicate it to others, so it is incumbent on him to refute the opposing falsehood." You can't "refute" an argument without at least giving it a hearing. The point is that the work of a Christian philosopher is intrinsically social and peaceable. Until we know what is meant when Stanley Fish uses the phrase "get along," the suspicion will be that this may not hold true for our opponents.

David Bruckbauer
South Bend, IN

In response to Stanley Fish:

And God made man
Or else man made himself
Or else he grew

To know not
Is to wonder
And to wish

One could consult
With fowl, beast
Or Fish.

(The Rev.) Walter Bauer
Richmond, IN

Is Stanley Fish giving us an example of his rule that you can't think about your own first principles? Early on, he says "reasoning can't get started until a first premise is put in place." "Satan and Adam are committed to both [knowledge by reason and knowledge by faith] simultaneously." Reason, then, is a kind of lever. You must stand somewhere in order to use it (and, of course, you can't use it to move the ground you stand on). What gets moved where depends on where you stand, and where you reach.

A few paragraphs later, though, "For the modern liberal, beliefs are what the mind scrutinizes and judges by rational criteria that are themselves hostage to no belief in particular." I have looked hard, though, and can find no explanation in this piece of how liberals can reason without beliefs. How does anyone do it? What is the method of judging that is based on the refusal to judge? How can you use a lever without standing anywhere? . . .

Craig M. White
Reykjavik, Iceland

Both Stanley Fish and Fr. Neuhaus, in their brief references to postmodernism, draw the wrong conclusions. Postmodern movements should be welcomed especially by Jews and Christians, since they represent a crushing defeat of the naturalistic paradigm in its latest (Enlightenment) form. The law, the prophets, and the Gospels all fought against the mythic conceptions of the self-subsistent universe regnant in their time, but we are fortunate enough to have seen the latest formulation of this worldview deconstruct itself.

In fact, late-twentieth-century scholarship has returned to the fundamental biblical categories of word and flesh (the shaping power of language and the meaning of embodiment), unconsciously demonstrating the continuing force of the Word.

The postmodern denial of the possibility of objective, neutral knowledge does not mean (as Fish writes) that "when it comes to proof, religious arguments are no worse off than any other." It means that the appeal to some kind of objective "proof" is itself ruled out, and therefore religious arguments, which have never *relied* on such a standard, can be far more intellectually convincing to a contemporary audience than to earlier ones more assured of the validity of naturalistic explanation.

The biblical claim that the knowledge accessible to finite creatures is always incomplete requires humility (as Neuhaus argues), not control, as Fish seems to think. If our knowledge were total and uncorrupted, we would not need faith. It is not, so we

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do—as Augustine indeed argued in a different age of uncertainty.

Susan Mennel
Humanities Program
University of New Hampshire
Durham, NH

I compliment Professor Fish on a thorough and well-reasoned defense of liberalism. His argument provided me with one of the best explanations of what modern day liberalism is all about, what is believed, and why. It revealed the total denial of the existence of any idea or concept rooted in faith and how it has no room in the marketplace of ideas. He demonstrated that faith begins where knowledge ends and the two concepts will never overlap.

I was disappointed in Father Neuhaus' response to Professor Fish in that he did not address the issue in the same detail and spirit to adequately argue his position. In it I felt let down by Fr. Neuhaus for not attempting a more staunch defense of his position with the use of classical argument to uncover possible fallacies contained in Prof. Fish's argument. I believe Prof. Fish got the better of Fr. Neuhaus.

Aurelius M. Corina
Ithaca, NY

Stanley Fish seemed to have well defended the twin propositions that, with given rules of argument, the choice of a premise, first, determines the conclusion and, also, conditions the arguer's understanding of the terms he uses, to the extent that, beyond mere "syntax and semantics," these terms involve his emotions. But then he lets slip that "two plus two equals four" is a "convention" subject to choice and sufferance, something like the use of color in traffic signals. Unnerved by the prospect of contentious mischief-makers able to snatch from us our simple mathematics, and unable to swallow the notion that the space probe to Jupiter was just a lucky shot in the dark (even in "alternative geometries" simple arithmetic remains intact within the safe confines of "syntax"), I fell into anxious doubts about Professor Fish's own arguments. Then, lest I lose faith in his twin propositions, which (with simple arithmetic) I had thought obvious, I stopped reading, to quit while still ahead.

Karl E. B. Lofquist
Bethesda, MD

For the sake of discussion, let us grant Professor Fish a validity to his interpretive psychology and suspect quasi-theology with regard to the characters in *Paradise Lost*. What strikes me as odd is his insistence that Satan as well as all others who rebel against God's order do so out of their rationality; they simply *cannot* accept the existence of God. Isn't it possible that they *will* not? St. Paul would say so and it would express the orthodox Christian understanding....

Adrian Valentino
Fort Collins, CO

Thank you very much for the provocative debate on "Why We Can/Can't Get Along." I found it disturbing that as plausible and well supported as the arguments were I could find no resolution....

There is a dimension to all this that was not discussed by either author. In many traditions, the goal of religious practice is to transcend reason: i.e., our rational justifications. Mystical traditions acknowledge that there is a dimension to life that subsists well beyond the rational. Their experiences in such maters are remarkably similar and share at least one notable attribute: they can't be described except by metaphor, parable, or paradoxical allusion....

From a transcendent view, most of the contentious issues of life, whether political or social, adopt a character of triviality. This is not to say that there isn't a plethora of tragedy or that we don't think our problems are serious. It is, rather, that the majority of these problems arise from our misapplied rationality and that the solution is in attaining to a position beyond reason: to a place where we can see things as they truly are and not as we think they should be. Then, the solutions become obvious and, counter to what Mr. Fish would have us hold, they can't "be left at home or out of the ballot box" because they spring from a transformed nature.

Robert Price
Morral, OH

First things are missing in the telling exchange between Stanley Fish and Richard John Neuhaus. Love is mentioned only once, in relation to tolerance. Will is not mentioned at all. Satan's sin, and ours (including many who claim to know and believe), is never an intellectual mistake. Nor is it a rebellion against authority. It is a refusal of reality, a failure of love. We are faithless, ignorant, and irrational because we have eyes and will not see, ears and will not hear, minds and will not understand. We don't get along with God and each other not because we can't, but because we won't. The debate could use a good dose of Dostoevsky, not to mention the prophets, John, Paul, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

(The Rev.) Thomas Hopko
St. Vladimir's Seminary
Crestwood, NY

The interchange between Stanley Fish and Richard John Neuhaus was particularly illuminating. But I wonder if the initial decision for or against faith is really as self-generating and self-justifying as Prof. Fish would have us believe.

I find it telling that he finds the "truths" of arithmetic as conventional and as arbitrary as traffic lights or driving on the right side of the road: an odd view on the face of it, but one quite necessary for the Fish thesis that all initial metaphysical stances are arbitrary stances without prior rational justification.

Most professional mathematicians of my acquaintance are Platonists in their theory of number (however much some of them might resist the label, given the conventional wisdom of what constitutes Platonism). And Fish's so-called "alternative geometries" only confirm that Platonism after Einstein made such extraordinary use of them in his theory of relativity.

After reading the Fish-Neuhaus exchange, I could not help but feel that what should *really* worry Mil-

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ton's Satan the most would be, not Michael's minions of loyal angels, but a Platonic ontology of number, one that would "make these odds all even."

Edward T. Oakes, S.J.
Seton Hall University
South Orange, NJ

The debate between Stanley Fish and Richard John Neuhaus was a remarkable presentation of strong, well-reasoned, and convincing arguments on both sides. After reading the opening piece I was convinced that Prof. Fish was absolutely right. In his rejoinder Fr. Neuhaus then convinced me to the contrary. That I finally came away feeling that Prof. Fish had slightly the better part of the debate probably owed more to his having the last word than to the superiority of his logic. . . .

Robert C. Tompkins
Towson, MD

Enlightenment and Original Sin

Peter L. Berger's "At Stake in the Enlightenment" (March) notes that there were Christians in the seventeenth century who spoke against witchcraft persecutions. In fact such opposition was by no means unknown, nor can it be attributed to newly enlightened ideas. For example, the English Puritan divine George Gifford had even in the sixteenth century used orthodox Calvinist theology to argue against the reality of witchcraft.

Witchcraft was on its way to disappearing before the Enlightenment got underway. For example, the Enlightenment had little to do with the spirit of repentance which manifested itself in Salem a few years after the notorious cases there.

More important, Professor Berger makes the familiar move of judging the Enlightenment by its theory, Christianity by its practice. Although the Enlightenment preached tolerance, it kicked back swiftly and viciously in the Reign of Terror. Even if Voltaire, had he been alive, would have opposed the Terror, its perpetrators still owed much to Enlightenment ideas. Proponents of toleration routinely use the term "Inquisition" as shorthand for persecution. They could just as validly say "Committee of Public Safety," but they never do.

James Hitchcock
St.Louis, MO

Peter Berger's essay can serve only to reinforce the "moral confusion" of which he speaks, because that confusion is to a considerable degree the product of the historical misperceptions and logical mistakes so much in evidence in his article. The following points in particular deserve mention:

The assumption that the mid-seventeenth century in central Europe was a time when "Christian values were reasonably dominant" is questionable. Three hundred years of schism and religious wars had shattered the Christian unity of the West. No doubt most Europeans of the time considered their values to be Christian, but they now spoke with a hundred different voices, and their differences were hardly minor.

Similarly, it is not clear that the mid-seventeenth century was safely removed from the Enlightenment. The most famous figures of the century, Descartes, Bacon, Locke, Gallileo, Newton, were the patron saints of the *philosophes*. Furthermore, the Enlightenment was in many ways simply the logical completion of certain fundamental assumptions of the Reformation: the sufficiency of the individual conscience, the utopian or millenarian anticipation of an imminent new age, sovereignty of the people, hostility to authority (particularly clerical authority). The *philosophes* simply extended to all of Christianity the reformers' charges against the Church.

Berger's implicit assumption that witch trials were typical of Christian civilization is simply wrong. The "witch craze" was largely confined to the period 1500 to 1700 and to those areas most affected by the "radical Reformation." It is telling that America's only witch trials occurred in Puritan New England and only in the seventeenth century.

Finally, and most importantly, Berger seems to think that the absence of witch trials after 1700 is due to some moral improvement owing to the Enlightenment. It is true, of course, that witch trials are unthinkable in the modern world, but are they *morally* unthinkable—or do we just not believe in witches anymore? Recall that the first great success of the enlightened heirs of the *philosophes* was the French Revolution and that in the first months of the Terror more "enemies of virtue" were hunted down and killed than in the entire two centuries of the witch craze. If this didn't establish the "moral superiority" of an age that had outgrown superstition, we have as further evidence the tyrannies, mass murders, reeducation camps, eugenics, and abortion mills of the twentieth century. All without historical precedent and all in the name of the "new morality."

There is indeed a great deal at stake in understanding the moral implications of the Enlightenment. It is most disappointing to think that FIRST THINGS may be ambivalent about this most crucial matter.

Stephen Bezanson
Austin, TX

Peter L. Berger replies:

Both James Hitchcock and Stephen Bezanson point out that the Enlightenment too gave birth to all sorts of moral horrors. Of course it did. So did virtually every set of ideas in human history, including (and perhaps especially) those that presented themselves as doctrines of compassion. The best explanation of this regrettable fact is the doctrine of original sin. At the same time the Enlightenment did produce a number of morally admirable insights which, however much sinned against, have served to humanize life in a number of modern societies. But, in any case, my purpose in the column was not primarily to put in a good word for the Enlightenment (the title of the column was chosen by the editors). Rather, it was to raise a gentle question about the common assumption by Christian conservatives that, at some time in the past when Christian values allegedly

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dominated society, life was morally superior and more humane.

Bezanson thinks that my choice of the seventeenth century was a bad one—too many influences of the Reformation and various proto-*philosophes* contaminating the moral atmosphere. It seems he wants to go back some three hundred years. That puts us in the fourteenth century. A morally edifying century indeed. Would one think of the Avignon papacy? Or the Hundred Years War? The savageries here are of the public order. In the private existence of individuals one might perhaps turn to the moral splendors described by Boccaccio. Maybe one should click back one more century. Back to the thirteenth—no Protestants and no *philosophes* in evidence, surely. Instead we might contemplate such humane achievements as the crusade against Langue d'Oc, which has left its mark on what became southern France to this day.

But let me not quibble. I would ask Bezanson and anyone else sharing his views to pick any time between the Constantinian Establishment and the French Revolution, and then to describe a society in which Christian values were truly dominant and which we should seek to emulate morally.

Traditional Postmodernism?

James Nuechterlein is certainly right that postmodernism is not well calculated to inspire deep commitments in thoughtful people ("Idols of the Century," March). But I wonder about the (growing?) editorial tendency of FIRST THINGS to articulate its underlying commitments in opposition to postmodernism. . . .

Granted, some wave the postmodern banner over all sorts of dubious causes, but I don't think it is wise to grant such people the power to define such an open-ended concept. In fact, postmodern skepticism about the autonomy of reason and science has surely helped open the field to the traditionalism that Nuechterlein champions. It has even contributed to the greater interest in and openness toward the role of religion in public life that has fueled the growth and influence of FIRST THINGS. Might FIRST THINGS be better off helping to articulate some sort of "traditional postmodernism" than posturing as a traditionalist alternative to the p-word? I'm just afraid that defining oneself against anything so baggy and pervasive doesn't leave a Christian thinker enough room to operate honestly and persuasively.

Steven M. Jensen
West Palm Beach, FL

James Nuechterlein replies:

Mr. Jensen assumes that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Not necessarily. He may be instead a different—and even more dangerous—enemy.

Nietzsche, Wild or Tame?

I am grateful to Werner J. Dannhauser, from whose own writings on Nietzsche I have learned much, for the praise he offers in his review of my book, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist* (February). And I am keenly aware of the honor he does me by holding my work up to "the highest standards." It is with a view to such standards, however, that I am obliged to observe that Dannhauser is not careful in every case to hold up to "the highest standards" the arguments I actually put forward.

Dannhauser takes special exception to my interpretation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, asserting that I have "domesticated" Nietzsche's thought through the "attempt to characterize the book as a whole as a failed 'thought experiment.'" Unfortunately, Dannhauser's characterization of my argument "as a whole" is seriously misleading.

Although I assert in the Introduction that Zarathustra's effort to achieve an unprecedented and supreme form of mastery fails, I at the same time stress that "what is a defeat in one sense is a triumph in another" (p. 19). And in the Conclusion I emphasize that "*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is, . . . as Nietzsche himself judged, the most profound and farsighted of his writings" (p. 263). Throughout, I argue that the dramatization of Zarathustra's failure to make himself the absolute author of his existence is a triumph of Nietzsche's art, a vindication of his love of truth, and, in effect, a radicalization—as well as a radical criticism—of the characteristically modern tendency to understand freedom as autonomy, or living in accordance with a law one has given oneself. On what definition could such an interpretation be fairly characterized as a "domestication" of Nietzsche's thought?

Peter Berkowitz
Department of Government
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA

Werner J. Dannhauser replies:

My opinion that Nietzsche undergoes a "somewhat excessive domestication" at the hands of Professor Berkowitz applies to the book as a whole and not particularly to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. To support my view, I presented as much evidence as can reasonably be crammed into a book review. Professor Berkowitz fails to refute that evidence; he fails even to address it. His attempt, in this letter as well as in his book, to distance a wilder Zarathustra from a tamer Nietzsche has too little textual warrant and thus strengthens my verdict.

Who "We" Are

In "Who You Are II" (Public Square, March), Richard John Neuhaus expressed regret that the Jewish readership of FIRSTTHINGS "is still much lower than we would like" and he added that "we don't know how to explain that." I would like to venture an explanation.

Quite obviously, I cannot speak for Jews in general, but I believe that my feeling about FIRST THINGS may be shared by many in the Jewish community. I was a subscriber and contributor to *This World* and I continue to read FIRST THINGS with considerable interest. I share the magazine's basic political outlook and I appreciate its thoughtful attention to the culture wars of our time. Unlike many Jewish liberals who display disrespect and mistrust of religious people, I reject the demonization of the Religious Right practiced by many Jewish secularists. While not a theist

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myself, I have a healthy respect for the Jewish-Christian moral tradition, I share most of its precepts, and I agree that this tradition is crucial for the moral renewal that this country so badly needs. And yet I am also often put off by what I read in FIRST THINGS. . . .

I am not a moral relativist and I admire the moral fervor of Pope John Paul II. I share his abhorrence of the moral decadence of modern society and I agree with the urgency of protecting unborn life. And yet, like many non-Catholics, I am uneasy about the Pope's claim to be the authoritative teacher of moral truth. As the Protestant theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg has said, the view that the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church "has the status of ultimate truth . . . is a temptation to intolerance." The idea that ecclesiastical teaching has the status of absolute truth, Pannenberg added, ignores the distinction between the "truth of God's revelation" which is ultimate and "our understanding of that truth [which] is always provisional and will remain so until the end of history."

Even those of us who share many of the values enunciated by Pope John Paul II have difficulties with accepting the Roman Catholic Church as the arbiter of human morality. The position, stated by the Pope in his encyclical *The Splendor of Truth* and regularly affirmed in the pages of FIRST THINGS, that the only way to avoid a relativistic conception of morality is to accept God as the essential condition of morality is surely not self-evidently correct. It is called into question by the existence of morally engaged philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and Sidney Hook. Such a point of view makes moral lepers of nontheists like myself and is sure to antagonize Jews, many of whom are religious agnostics.

It may well be that nonreligious persons considered morally praiseworthy are so considered because their conduct coincides with an implicit Judeo-Christian norm that is today part of our moral heritage, but the fact remains that it is possible to be a morally upright individual without religious belief in the formal and traditional sense of that term.

Guenter Lewy
Washington, D.C.

Like Father Neuhaus, I was more than interested in finding out who "we" are. Apart from my family, I, personally, know no other who shares our passion for FIRST THINGS (not that we don't regularly do our share of "talking it up"). What the survey revealed about "us" was not entirely surprising, and yet there were a few intriguing statistics. You do well not to "take seriously" the data suggesting 85 percent of subscribers are male to 15 percent who are female. There are eight subscribers (although, technically, just four) in my family, only half of whom are male. The fact that the names of my husband and my sisters' husbands appear on the subscriptions may say a bit more about who we are. Just for the record, although my father is responsible for our exposure to the journal, it was the woman in this house who initiated that first year's subscription to FT. It is my sisters with whom I regularly converse concerning the contents thereof. Your "niche" may include a lot more of us than you suspect.

Another possibly revealing glimpse at who we are may be reflected in this family's habit of beginning many a cross-country phone conversation with the words, "Did you get the new issue of FIRST THINGS yet?" . . .

Rebecca L. Keller
Wethersfield, CT

Who's Confrontational?

Richard John Neuhaus' tongue-lashing of Dr. Eugene Brand (The Public Square, March) is extremely ironic.

Father Neuhaus says Dr. Brand's "assertion" that "the only answer . . . is no" (in response to the question "Is there any earthly reason why women should not be ordained?") is "confrontational rather than dialogical." However, Father Neuhaus asserts, "In 1994 and 1995 the Catholic Church again—this time in a form that clearly makes the teaching unchangeable in the future—declared that the Church is not authorized to ordain women to the priesthood. As much as we can say 'never' about anything in history, we can say that the Orthodox will never ordain women to the priesthood." This is nonconfrontational, ecumenical dialogue?

Apparently, assertions by those opposing ordination of women are acceptable—they are "dialogical." It's only assertions by those favoring ordination of women that are "confrontational."

Forrest H. Scott
Middletown, OH

Save the Poems

Please, please, don't pitch out the poems! I was not privileged to participate in your reader survey ("Who You Are II," March). Even if I had, I probably would not have ranked poetry near the top of my favorite-features list either. But that was before you ruminated about dispensing with it altogether. Then I realized what a loss that would be. . . .

The poems are much more than mere relaxation from the stress of reading heavier stuff. Good poetry requires even more attention than good prose, but attention of a different quality. Someone has defined poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity." It is nearly impossible to read the kind of high-quality poetry your editor Prof. Baumgaertner has provided unless you slow down to a smell-the-roses mental pace, fold your hands, and pay full and careful attention to the world evoked by the poem.

For example, when I read "Living Under Authority" by Suzanne Lawrence (October 1995), I was transported to a back yard in the midwest (Illinois? Iowa?) as the vast shadow of the moon swept over the land. With those few lines the author evoked emotions in me ranging from nostalgia to fear to awe, and some that even now I cannot express in words. It was a blessing, a vessel of grace received in the midst of a busy day. . . .

Karl D. Stephan
Belchertown, MA

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This Time

One Angry Man

James Nuechterlein

It is Tuesday morning in Holy Week and my mood is appropriately somber. Not, I fear, out of piety, but because I have just arrived at the Supreme Court of the State of New York, County of New York, to begin a stint on jury duty. The administrative judge of the court bids me and the two hundred other Manhattanites gathered in the Jury Assembly Room an avuncular welcome. He tells us how grateful the people of New York are that we have agreed to serve this important civic function, though he adds, with a practiced smile, that if we hadn't agreed we would be paying $1,500 fines. I am not amused. (And I learn later that the fine is only $250.)

My surly mood reflects my memory of the last time I served, some three years ago. It was one of the more frustrating experiences of my life. I spent the better part of two weeks not getting appointed to a jury. I wandered from courtroom to courtroom, assigned to one panel of prospective jurors after another, but the results were always the same—excused without cause.

It seems I am not good jury material, especially from a defense lawyer's point of view. I am an over-educated white middle-aged male—the type, apparently, most likely to side with the prosecution. Things are made worse by the fact that I work for the Institute on Religion and Public Life and am editor of a religious journal. This reinforces the defense's suspicion that I am stern on law-and-order—they hear religion and imagine the Christian Coalition. At the same time, the religion factor raises questions for the State: I might just be one of those liberal Christians who identify religion with the Higher Niceness. Either way, I'm too risky.

By the end of that last stint, frustration had begun to edge into full-blown paranoia. I took the repeated rejections personally. What was wrong with me? Why didn't they want me? I imagined desperate rhetorical strategies for approval. *Look, I'm really very fair-minded. I won't prejudge your clients (even if they do all look guilty). I'm a Libra, the one represented by scales—as in justice. Give me a chance. Please.*

But the lawyers remained merciless in rejection, and my mental pleading gave way to contempt. *All right, you lowlife ambulance chasers. I know a conspiracy against justice when I see one. You're excluding me just to protect that obviously guilty bunch of sociopaths you're stooging for. Forget* Twelve Angry Men: *Henry Fonda was a liberal wimp and the kid he got off probably went out and mugged little old ladies.* By the time I was released from duty, I was in very bad shape.

So, three years later, the gratitude of the people of New York for my anticipated service does not impress me. Nor is my mood improved by the presence of my fellow would-be jurors. As I recall from last time, there's a big gender gap in our patterns of social interaction. Most of the men sit in wary solitude, while many of the women are forming lifetime relationships with people they met ten minutes ago. At the time of my first service, a woman at the office explained that one of the redeeming features of jury duty is that you get to meet so many new people. "Why would you want to do that?" I thought. No wonder defense lawyers prefer women to men as jurors (the weaker the case, one suspects, the stronger the preference). Women obviously lack the sense of stony isolation that is essential to the judicial temperament.

A young woman next to me is expatiating to two women behind us on how she hates to go back home (she keeps calling it "middle America") because the people there are so narrow-minded. "I mean, they've never really met homosexuals. My hairdresser is my best friend. Though he'd never admit it if he could see my hair today." I silently agree on the last point, and begin to ponder how I can fit the fine for not serving into my budget.

But now it is late Wednesday morning, and my mood has improved wonderfully. First, the woman with the hairdresser friend is seated way across the room. Second, we have been informed that it is now the normal policy of the court that those who don't get picked for a trial within three days are let off. Finally, and most promisingly, there were very few calls for jury panels yesterday. Things were so slow that they gave us an extra half-hour for lunch. (The semi-officious clerk announced our good fortune in the manner of a medieval lord graciously dispensing a benefaction.) To add to my growing sense of well-being, I found a nice Italian restaurant on Mulberry Street a few blocks behind the courthouse. After lunch, there were no calls for juries at all, and the clerk, beaming with generosity, let us go an hour early.

I am coming to understand that I have stumbled, entirely by accident, into the ideal time to be called for jury service. This is Holy Week for Christians. One does not expect Christian judges or lawyers to want to spend Good Friday in court. (It is not a civic holiday here.)

This is also—and even more significant to my immediate situation—the beginning of Passover for Jews. As is often noted, there are more Jews in New York than in any other city in the world. And, in the current parlance, they are "overrepresented" in the judicial system—as a glance at the roster of judges posted in the courthouse lobby quickly confirms. Tonight is the beginning of Passover, and tomorrow

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is the officially recognized holiday itself. I begin to count on slow times at the New York City courthouse. Sure enough, we are dismissed for the day at noon.

Thursday morning, and I am awash in interreligious good feelings. For this group, it is our third and almost certainly final day of service. This is good for the Jews, I think, and also for everyone else. At 11:00 A.M., the clerk, now beloved by us all, begins the process of dismissing us from duty. (We all have to get our little pieces of paper certifying that we have served and protecting us from recall for a minimum of two years.) By 11:45 I am on the street.

As I head for my third straight lunch at the little Italian restaurant, I am filled with a sense of pride over a civic duty honorably fulfilled. My faith in the legal system has been restored. I look up at the sentence carved on the courthouse facade: "The true administration of justice is the firmest pillar of good government." I couldn't agree more. FT

She Writes of Her Garden (June 1930)

My Grandmother writes of her garden
wallflowers & cornflowers
from early April showers
like beautiful wounds healing across the bed
from blue to purple to dark pink
to light pink to white
& then geraniums in May
But she cannot see the geraniums

She writes of her garden
from the cool of the cellar
where she cannot see zinnias explode
with life or blood-red roses
contrasting the portulacas' flesh
An armoured vehicle is sowing shells
(not cockle shells) broken glass
between the rows of flowers

She writes of her garden
not so much of the British Consul
asking missionaries
south of the Yellow River
to evacuate to Hankow
but of yellow marigolds
& hollyhocks
& Japanese sunflowers for the house

D. S. Martin

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Opinion

DNA: The Message in the Message

Nancy R. Pearcey

Christians who work in the natural sciences are dogged by a persistent bogeyman: a singular creature called the God of the gaps. Should a believer ever conclude that natural forces are inadequate to produce some phenomenon in the natural world, the bogeymen is poised to spring from the shadows. Its power to intimidate can be seen in an essay by philosopher Nancey Murphy in *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* in which she backs away from any suggestion that Christians ought to challenge naturalism in science. Murphy argues that believers are properly "wary of invoking divine action in any way in science, especially in biology, fearing that science will advance, providing the naturalistic explanations that will make God appear once again to have been an unnecessary hypothesis." Such Christians fear being cast in the same category as primitives attributing thunder to the raging of their gods.

But in a deft turning of the tables, Stephen M. Barr conjured up a counter-spook in "The Atheism of the Gaps" (FIRST THINGS, November 1995). We are so conditioned to expect scientific breakthroughs that exceed our expectations, Barr observed, that we reflexively reject any idea that science has limits. Yet science reveals not only the rich possibilities of nature but also its limitations. To give obvious examples, we know that we will never fulfill the alchemists' dream of chemically transmuting lead into gold. We know that a parent of one species will never give birth to offspring of another species. Science reveals consistent patterns that allow us to make negative statements about what natural forces *cannot* do. To persist in seeking natural laws in such cases, Barr suggested, is as irrational as any primitive myth of the thunder gods.

The example Barr considered was human consciousness, focusing on Roger Penrose's argument that the mind cannot be explained by currently known laws of physics. As a convinced materialist, Penrose holds out the hope that new and unimaginable physical laws are nonetheless out there, just waiting to be discovered. As Barr comments, materialism clearly functions for Penrose as a faith of the gaps: When science reveals phenomena that surpass the explanatory power of known natural laws, materialism takes refuge in the hope of turning up "undiscovered and unprecedented" laws, different in kind from any currently known.

Another field that often elicits the materialist's faith of the gaps is origin-of-life research. The discovery of DNA revealed that at the core of life is a molecular message that contains a staggering quantity of information. A single cell of the human body contains as much information as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*—all thirty volumes of it—three or four times over. As a result, the question of the origin of life must now be recast as the origin of biological information. The materialist is committed to constructing an explanation that appeals solely to physical-chemical laws. And it is true that the bases, sugars, and phosphates comprising the nucleotides in DNA are ordinary chemicals that react according to ordinary laws. Yet those same laws do not explain how the chemicals came to function as a cellular language.

We know, after all, the characteristic effects of physical forces: They create either random patterns, like the pile of leaves against my back fence, or else ordered, repetitive structures, like ripples on a beach or the molecular structure of crystals. But information theory teaches us that neither random nor repetitive structures carry high levels of information.

The information content of any structure is defined as the minimum number of instructions needed to specify it. For example, a random pattern of letters has a low information content because it requires very few instructions: 1) Select a letter of the English alphabet and write it down, and 2) Do it again. A highly ordered but repetitive pattern likewise has low information content. Wrapping paper with "Merry Christmas" printed all over in ornate gold letters is highly ordered, but it can be specified with very few instructions: 1) Write "M-e-r-r-y C-h-r-i-s-t-m-a-s," and 2) Do it again.

By contrast, a structure with high information content requires a large number of instructions. If you want your computer to print out the poem "'Twas the Night Before Christmas," you must specify every letter, one by one. There are no shortcuts. This is the kind of order we find in DNA. It would be impossible to produce a simple set of instructions telling a chemist how to synthesize the DNA of even the simplest bacterium. You would have to specify every chemical "letter," one by one.

The high level of complexity in DNA has led researchers to abandon chance theories of life's origin in favor of theories of spontaneous self-organization. The guiding principle in the field today is (in the words of chemist Cyril Ponnamperuma) that

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"there are inherent properties in the atoms and molecules which seem to direct the synthesis in the direction most favorable" for producing the macromolecules of life. But so far no one has been able to identify these mysterious self-organizing properties. The best that scientists can do is draw analogies to spontaneous ordering in *non*living structures, such as crystals.

The unique structure of any crystal is the result of what we might think of as the "shape" of its atoms (or ions), which causes them to slot into a particular position and to layer themselves in a fixed, orderly pattern. "If we could shrink ourselves to the atomic scale," writes zoologist Richard Dawkins in *The Blind Watchmaker*, "we would see almost endless rows of atoms stretching to the horizon in straight lines—galleries of geometric repetition."

Many scientists find it irresistible to draw an analogy between this example of spontaneous ordering and the origin of DNA. For example, chemist Graham Cairns-Smith proposes that DNA originated by sticking to the surface of crystals in certain clays, with the crystals acting as a template to organize life's building blocks in precise arrays. In *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, philosopher Daniel Dennett goes so far as to speak of DNA as itself a carbon-based, self-replicating crystal.

But the fatal flaw in all such theories is that crystals, while highly ordered, are low in information content. The structure of a crystal is strictly repetitive—"galleries of geometric repetition." If the forces that produced DNA were analogous to those that produce a crystal, then DNA would consist of a single or at most a few patterns repeating again and again—like Christmas wrapping paper—and it would be incapable of storing and transmitting large quantities of information.

Nor is this problem solved by newer theories of complexity. In *At Home in the Universe*, Stuart Kauffman claims that complexity theory will uncover laws that make life inevitable. But the ferns, swirls, and snowflakes that complexity theorists construct on their computer screens represent the same kind of order as crystals. In Kauffman's words, they are constructed by the repeated application of a few "astonishingly simple rules." Like crystals, these structures can be specified with only a few instructions, followed by "Do it again."

The upshot is that DNA exhibits too much "design work" (as Cairns-Smith puts it) to be the product of mere chance, yet there are no known physical laws capable of doing the necessary work. Once we apply the tools of information theory, all the plausible candidates fall out of the race. No known physical laws produce the right kind of ordered structure: one with high information content.

This is not a statement about our ignorance—a "gap" in knowledge that one might be tempted to bridge with an appeal to the supernatural. Rather, it is a statement about what we know—about the consistent character of natural laws. If the structure of the DNA molecule were a regular, repeated pattern, then it would make sense to look for a general law of assembly to explain its origin. But instead we must look for something that specified each nucleotide one by one.

We also know, from information theory, how codes work. Encoded messages are independent of the physical medium used to store and transmit them. If we knew how to translate the message in a DNA molecule, we could write it out using ink or crayon or electronic impulses from a keyboard. We could even take a stick and write it in the sand—all without affecting its meaning. In other words, the sequence of "letters" in DNA is chemically arbitrary: There is nothing intrinsic in the chemicals themselves that explains why particular sequences carry a particular message. In the words of chemist-turned-philosopher Michael Polanyi, the sequence of nucleotides is "extraneous to" the physical and chemical properties within the molecule—which is to say, the sequence is not determined by inherent physical-chemical forces. In fact, it is precisely this "physical indeterminacy" (Polanyi's phrase) that gives nucleotides the flexibility to function as letters in a message—to be arranged and rearranged in a host of unpredictable patterns, like the letters on a page. But physical indeterminacy also implies that physical forces did not *originate* the pattern—any more than the text on this page originated from the physical properties of the paper and ink.

If we consult everyday experience, we readily note that objects with a high information content—books, computer disks, musical scores—are products of intelligence. It is reasonable to conclude, by analogy, that the DNA molecule is likewise the product of an intelligent agent. This is a contemporary version of the design argument, and it does not rest on ignorance—on *gaps* in knowledge—but on the explosive *growth* in knowledge thanks to the revolution in molecular biology and the development of information theory.

In spite of this extensive new evidence, the materialist continues to hold out for the discovery of some new physical laws to explain the origin of biological information. As chemist Manfred Eigen writes in *Steps Towards Life*, "Our task is to find an algorithm, a natural law that leads to the origin of information." Yet no known natural forces produce structures with high information content, and so the elusive law that Eigen hopes to find must be different in kind from any we currently know. Surely *that* qualifies as an argument from ignorance—the materialist's God of the gaps.

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When Words Kill

Yitzchok Adlerstein

Even before Yigal Amir was sentenced to life imprisonment for the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, a related trial had already been concluded in the court of public opinion. Tragically, Jewish law itself has been roundly pilloried as an accessory to the crime, after an inquest held in absentia.

Jewish law has an enviable past, particularly in promoting the sanctity of human life. It was Jewish law, after all, that first crowned each human life with absolute value. While their neighbors drenched their altars with the blood of small children to propitiate their gods, the prophets of ancient Israel thundered their formula for pleasing the Almighty. "Let the oppressed go free. . . . Divide your bread with the hungry. . . . When you see the naked, cover him." For Isaiah and his colleagues, G-d was best served by enhancing the quality of the lives of others.

The earliest rabbinic writings continued the tradition. "Whoever saves the life of a single person is considered as saving the entire world," claimed the Mishna. Jewish law regarded life as so sacred that all precepts of the Torah could be suspended to save it, excepting three cardinal transgressions. And one of those three was murder. Jewish law was so loath to take a human life that criminal procedure was hopelessly stacked in favor of the defendant. If the twenty-three judges managed to reach a guilty verdict in a capital case, they were required to fast the entire day. And if they found for guilt unanimously, charges were dismissed. A court that could not produce someone to back the defendant obviously was not doing its job well.

The Talmud sums up its internal audit of procedure in capital cases appropriately enough. "A court that takes a life once in seventy years is a killer court." This is the lenient view. Others suggest an even longer interval.

In the course of history, these lessons were not lost to the Jewish people. It is no surprise, then, that murder was never a popular Jewish vice, even among those who jettisoned their observance of much of the rest of Jewish law.

The Devil, however, can cite Scripture; his disciples turn to case law and statute. Somehow, Yigal Amir thought that he found justification from the law itself. Amir decided that Yitzhak Rabin's negotiations with the Palestinians posed an immediate threat to the lives of tens of thousands of Israelis. Jewish law (as well as many other codes) allows (actually demands) anyone to take the life of a murderous pursuer—or *rodef*—of his innocent victim. Amir thus claimed that Mr. Rabin was a *rodef*, and that it was a *mitzvah* (commandment) to kill him.

The argument is specious, and was denounced as such by virtually every major and minor Jewish legal thinker. To be a *rodef*, the pursuer must perform some act that is *objectively* life-threatening. The models in the literature make it clear that one cannot be a *rodef* to some and a savior to others. Arguably, there are as many Israelis who believe that the peace process will save lives as those who believe that the consequences will be insufferable. Besides, one argument alone justifies taking the life of the *rodef*: the certainty that the pursued will be saved. No sane person could have guaranteed that killing Rabin would stop the peace process in its tracks. If anything, killing Rabin immediately had the opposite effect, dramatically increasing popular support for the Labor position.

Suppose, though, that all of this evaded Yigal Amir. Suppose he found support for his argument from a handful of sympathizers well-read in the law. What would the law expect of him?

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah in 1944—as Irving Rosenbaum relates in *Holocaust and Halakhah*—the Nazi commandant of Auschwitz purged the camp of all teenage boys who were not tall and strong enough to work. The victims of the selection were herded together in a special cell block, without food or drink, with the understanding that they would be sent to the crematoria the next evening.

A father turned to Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Meisels for a halakhic (Jewish legal) decision. The father had valuables hidden away with which he could bribe the guards to release his son. Should he do so, another boy would have to be snatched to replace the one who was missing, since an exact count had been taken. Was it permissible to do so? He was ready to submit to any decision rendered by the rabbi.

Rabbi Meisels implored the man not to ask him the question. How could he decide on such a weighty matter in the hell of Auschwitz, without consulting texts or colleagues? A matter of life and death required the sitting of a veritable Sanhedrin to decide. The father insisted, but Rabbi Meisels was just as firm in his reluctance.

The next day the man returned. "Rabbi, I have done what the Torah has obligated me to do. . . . If you cannot tell me that I may ransom my child, it is a sign that in your own mind, you are not certain that Halakhah permits it. . . . So for me your evasion is tantamount to a *psak din*—a clear decision—that I am forbidden to do so. . . . I accept G-d's decree with love and with joy. I will do nothing to ransom him at the cost of another innocent life, for so the Torah has commanded."

This father, unlike Yigal Amir, demonstrated an understanding of what Jewish law is all about: When in doubt, refrain. Millennia of Jewish legal responsa point to a persistent pattern. Issues are never decided by finely crafted arguments alone. Halakhah demands that you first consider every nuance of every

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possible objection to your argument, and convincingly refute all of them. Only after you dismiss the competition does halakhah provide you with a forum for advancing your own theory. The more important the issue, the higher the stakes, the greater evidence you need to amass, both against the opposing position, as well as in support of your own. And nothing is weightier in Jewish law than the taking of a human life.

There are only two crooked paths that Amir could have taken to pervert the law as he did. Perhaps, despite the enormity of the issues, despite all the attendant doubts, he decided not to ask questions beyond his own small circles. Had he inquired in the Jewish legal world at large, he would have been stunned by the ferocity of his rejection. If this is what he did, he clearly contravened the process of Jewish law. Alternatively, he did not have any doubts at all, because he already had answers, and had no need to ask. Amir, student of both Jewish and Western codes, practiced bad law before practicing murder.

It should be noted, however, that another feature of Jewish law makes it difficult to finger Amir as an isolated, diabolic culprit. Because Jewish law has a religious basis, and answers to a higher authority than the state, it can easily intertwine the ethical with the purely legal. Feeding the poor, visiting the sick, helping a neighbor are not just admirable acts; they are demanded by statute, and became part of the fabric of daily life.

Legal texts recognized both the law and what lies beyond its letter—and then made both normative. Nowhere, perhaps, is this more evident than in halakhic attitudes towards speech. Jewish law was much more concerned with the specter of Pharaoh, the traditional personification of moral turpitude, than with the sceptre of King George III and his burdensome meddling. The awesome and insidious power of speech loomed greater in the halakhic mind than any deprivation of personal liberty.

Restrictions on free speech, therefore, are not uncommon. Any uncomplimentary speech, however true and accurate, was banned under the rubric of *lashon hara*, evil speech. It is one of the most serious transgressions of Jewish law described in the literature. (One halakhic icon of the early twentieth century enumerated some forty-odd biblical transgressions that a simple, matter-of-fact conversation could spawn.)

The third-century *Pirkei Avot*, perhaps the oldest rabbinic text dealing with ethics alone, pithily declared, "Wise men! Be careful with your words!" warning that words misunderstood or misinterpreted by others could result in tragic consequences for the hapless speaker, and the ultimate desecration of the Divine Name. Not the fool, not the loose cannon is adjured here to be circumspect, but the wise man. He is warned that an occupational hazard of sagacity is the belief that others will surely understand precisely what you mean.

Alas, claimed the rabbis of the Talmud (anticipating Murphy's Law), the wiser you are, the more likely you will not be understood. Amir bears full responsibility for his heinous crime. But wise men all over have reason to examine their own behavior. Some, by asking some purely theoretical questions about leadership gone awry, made the unthinkable thinkable. For those only waiting for an excuse, the thinkable eventually became possible and then probable.

Others—on both sides of the Israeli political divide—helped create the charged atmosphere that became the backdrop to the crime by using words so incendiary that they demonized the hateful "other." Perhaps none of them fully meant what they said. But the Divine Name was indeed profaned. In the final analysis, Amir's actions had nothing to do with Halakhah. So before people excoriate Jewish law, they should stop and remember that much of their distaste for his cowardly and despicable act owes historically to that very same tradition.

At the same time, they should remember that law itself is a poor guarantor of the good society. Ancient Jerusalem was destroyed, claims the Talmud, because its inhabitants stuck to the law and refused to move beyond its letter. There is a lesson here for the practice of politics everywhere. Politicians and political commentators may smugly point to their positions, clearly within the confines of the law. Along the way, though, they might ask themselves: How many untoward passions will be inflamed by their rhetoric? How many crazies will find succor and support for their fantasies? The speakers will claim, quite honestly, that they meant nothing of the sort.

Words uttered, though, are like teenagers. They seldom come back to seek the advice of those who first breathed life into them. It would be wonderful, but hopelessly naive, to believe that Yitzhak Rabin was the last casualty of words run amok.

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Mock Medicine, Mock Law

Eric M. Chevlen

The first thing the coroner noticed was the bright pink blush of the cheeks—the artificial pink that only carbon monoxide gives its victims. And in Oakland County, Michigan, death by carbon monoxide poisoning suggests only one perpetrator: Jack Kevorkian.

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As an expert in the management of cancer pain, I was called on by prosecutors in the first of this year's Kevorkian trials in Michigan to review the medical records of one of the victims, obtained from a police search of the unlicensed pathologist's home. I also reviewed the videotaped interview Kevorkian had made with the victim, shortly before his death by inhalation of poisonous gas.

I thought I had grown used to seeing death. But the other deaths I have seen were different from the images in this amateur videotape. The earlier deaths I have witnessed were almost always those of people whose pain was controlled, people surrounded by family as life slipped away. But this Kevorkian-assisted death was to be more like a veterinarian putting the family dog to sleep.

The videotape seemed to be filmed in a cheap hotel room. It showed a man with advanced myeloma (bone cancer) asking for assistance in suicide. He appeared to be a textbook example of depression in the face of medical illness and inadequately treated pain: the flat voice, the lack of eye contact, the moving description of how life no longer yielded any pleasure, and even the veiled contempt he expressed for his own disability. I have seen many such patients in my career. In every case, the request for suicide was a symptom of depression, a treatable complication of cancer. In every case, proper treatment of the patient's pain, accompanied by emotional support and occasionally antidepressants resulted in reversal of the wish to be killed. As I watched the interview, I felt like shouting at the eerily jovial "doctor" on the screen, "He's depressed, you idiot! Treat him, don't kill him!"

But of course I knew that only a few hours after the videotape was made the myeloma patient had joined the long list of those who had died "in the presence of" Jack Kevorkian.

The encounter between Kevorkian and his victim was a simulacrum of a genuine medical interview. When Kevorkian asked the victim whether or not he had been experiencing pain, it was not with the intent to find a better medicine to treat it. It was to justify the use of the carbon monoxide he had obtained even before meeting him. When Kevorkian asked about the victim's anguish and wish to die, it was not to assess or relieve the obvious depression. It was to document that his "assistance" was given only with the victim's consent.

Consent is the key issue for euthanasiasts, for only consent separates euthanasia from homicide. The tacit, if not explicit, assumption of euthanasiasts is that suicide is a rational choice for those with advanced illness or disability. When life no longer yields adequate pleasure, they argue, it should be the individual's right to end that life, and society's duty to provide him assistance in doing so. Thus the desire to commit suicide, which psychiatrists worldwide recognize as one of the diagnostic criteria of a major mood disorder, is interpreted by the euthanasiast as a civil liberty that must be honored.

Yet this assumption of the rationality of suicide flies in the face of decades of research into suicide and its risk factors. Study after study has shown that the vast majority of cancer patients who commit suicide or seek assistance in suicide are in fact clinically depressed. That their depression has gone unrecognized as a disease and untreated should not surprise us. Depression, even in those without advanced illness, may be the most underdiagnosed and undertreated illness in America. And the general ignorance of the medical community concerning depression is compounded in the specific case of the gravely ill. At least in the case of otherwise healthy people, the recognition of depression, when it does occur, usually leads to treatment. But in the case of patients with advanced illness, on those rare occasions when depression is recognized, it is all too often erroneously thought to be "normal" and "appropriate," and therefore not a proper object of treatment.

To what may this be compared? Imagine that a patient goes to a doctor complaining of back pain. The work-up reveals metastatic cancer in the spine as the cause of the pain. Now, no doctor will tell the patient, "Of course you have pain. You have cancer. It's to be expected." . . . and then do nothing to treat the pain! Yet it is commonplace for doctors and families and even patients to conclude that depression associated with serious illness is "to be expected," and therefore cannot and should not be treated.

Pain, too, is woefully undertreated in cancer patients. Doctors, like laymen, seem unaware of the revolution in pain medicine that has occurred in the last few decades. While further discoveries in the treatment of pain will of course be welcome, we already know enough now to manage virtually all cases of malignant pain successfully. The widely held belief that pain can be relieved only by doses of morphine so high as to render the patient a zombie is a pernicious myth. In the presence of cancer pain, morphine and drugs like it are remarkably well tolerated in a wide range of doses. I personally have cared for patients who have gone snorkeling or who pump iron regularly—all the while on high doses of morphine to suppress their pain. What is so often referred to as untreatable pain is almost always simply untreated pain.

If Kevorkian's interview seemed merely the simulacrum of medicine, his trial seemed merely the simulacrum of justice. Two years earlier, the presiding judge, Jessica Cooper, had thrown out the double felony case against Kevorkian, basing her ruling on her belief that the Michigan statute forbidding assisted suicide was unconstitutional. The state Supreme Court lost no time in overturning that decision. (This was not to be the last time that one of Judge Cooper's decisions would be overturned.)

When the criminal case returned to her court-

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room, she did not recuse herself as being biased in the matter. Yet the judge's initial instructions to the jury were such a distortion of the law that an appellate court ordered her to change them even while the trial was still in progress. In a bizarre exercise of "judicial restraint," she did not inform the jury that her instructions had been overturned by the appellate court, but simply read a paragraph from that court's decision to the jury. The arcane language of the appellate ruling, unexplicated by Judge Cooper, led some jury members to send requests for clarification to the judge. But Judge Cooper did not give proper instruction to the jury until she was explicitly ordered to do so by the appellate court. Just to be sure, this time the appellate court wrote the full text for her to read to the jury.

The Michigan law forbidding assisted suicide had been written in response to the public outcry to "do something" about Kevorkian. The law formulated into statute what had previously been, and still is, common law in Michigan. It forbade assisting suicide, but left one loophole: if a medication were given a patient with the intent to relieve pain or discomfort, any death that might occur from such medication was not to be considered felonious. It was through this loophole that the defense attorney, Geoffrey Fieger, would ultimately slither.

In her initial instruction to the jury, Judge Cooper instructed them that the prosecution had to prove that Kevorkian "intended solely to cause death and not to relieve pain or discomfort." Understandably the prosecution objected to this burden of having to prove a negative. The appellate court corrected Cooper: the prosecution only had to prove that the defendant had intentionally assisted in a suicide, whether or not he had other intentions as well. Because the facts of the case were essentially unarguable, that left the defense with the burden of showing that in giving carbon monoxide, Kevorkian's intent was relief of pain or discomfort, rather than causing death.

During my examination by the prosecutor, I was asked when in my medical training I had learned that carbon monoxide was a toxic agent with no palliative benefit. I replied that I had learned that fact before I began my medical training. One would have thought that such commonplace knowledge would not need buttressing by an expert witness. But Mr. Fieger, whose rudeness to witnesses and arrogance had led some courtroom observers to liken him to an "overgrown schoolyard bully with a bad haircut," argued with a straight face that Kevorkian's purpose in supplying the poison gas had not been to kill, but rather to relieve pain and suffering. Of course, euthanasiasts *always* claim that only death can end the pain and suffering of their victims. If the Michigan legislature meant to allow relief of pain and suffering by the always-fatal administration of carbon monoxide, it is difficult to imagine what they intended to outlaw.

It is not as though some new legal concept must be created to understand that if an action has absolutely inevitable forbidden consequences, that action itself is forbidden. In the Talmud, this concept is called *p'sik reisha v'lo yamut*, "let his head be cut off but let him not die." This legal principle was known to the rabbis of Babylonia over two thousand years ago. Nonetheless, the confused jurors in Judge Cooper's courtroom, making no distinction between motive and intent, found Jack Kevorkian not guilty of the charges against him. It was a dismaying spectacle: it seemed like a search for justice, but—like Kevorkian's medicine—it was a perversion of what it struggled to resemble.

Somehow all this facade and mimicry is perfectly appropriate for a trial that revolved around the question of euthanasia. For euthanasia, in its promise of "a good life, a good death," does not put an end to burdensome treatment; it puts an end to burdensome people. It does not relieve pain and suffering; it eliminates the desperate people whose inadequately treated pain and depression have led them to want suicide. Euthanasia does not care for the disabled; it shows contempt for them by saying that their lives are not worthy of living.

With his choice of carbon monoxide as his agent of death, Jack Kevorkian has stumbled upon the perfect metaphor for the euthanasia movement. It has no odor or color; it appears to be simply so much air. But all it leaves in its wake is a pink-cheeked corpse.

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On The Other Hand

Two Cheers for Class

Peter L. Berger

The human sciences in America are in a state of advanced and seemingly irreversible decay. One look at the programs for the annual meetings at which the practitioners of these disciplines gather suffices to convince one of this diagnosis. There are exceptions, of course. Here and there one finds people doing honest scholarly work, but most of them

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are in a position of "inner emigration" within their professions.

The agenda of the majority consists of more or less esoteric incantations of miscellaneous "progressive" dogmas. The most common incantation, indeed a sort of mantra, is "race, class, and gender," referring to categories that supposedly describe the most important realities in human society. All of them have to do with power or lack of power. No wonder that Nietzsche is experiencing a surprising revival in these circles. No longer repudiated as a spiritual ancestor of Nazism (a charge that was quite unfair to begin with), he is now made to legitimate every variant of political correctness on the left; one can imagine his discomfort if news of this reaches him in whatever sector of the hereafter is reserved for bad philosophers.

Race, class, gender. The mantra deserves a bit of deconstruction. "Race," as the weight of evidence from physical anthropology shows, is a political fiction, not a biological fact. As far as one knows, all human beings who have lived in historically recorded times have been of the same species, as are all human beings living today. Physical characteristics, of course, are unevenly distributed and "race" could be a convenient term to describe certain clusters of these characteristics, including skin color. To speak of a "white race" or a "black race," however, is to proclaim a political agenda rather than a scientifically tenable description (even leaving aside the obvious fact that most "whites" are pink and most "blacks" brown). Let me observe in passing that in future I intend to devote much energy to raising the consciousness of elderly, overweight, bald males as a clearly superior "race" entitled to a much larger share of power than is presently enjoyed by its members.

"Gender" is feminist English for "sex." The very term reveals the ideological agenda. It is a term derived from grammar, unlike "sex," which refers to (in this instance) undeniable biological differences. Grammatical gender is freely variable. Thus the word for "sun" is feminine in German (*die Sonne*) and masculine in French (*le soleil*); these gender assignments are arbitrary and could just as well be reversed. The ideological implication, of course, is that all so-called "gender roles" are just as freely variable—men nurturing babies, women ramming bayonets into enemy bellies, and so on. Comparative anthropological studies do show that the social roles assigned to the two sexes are variable to some extent. The notion, though, that these role assignments are sovereignly free of all biological determinants is almost certainly an illusion. Like "race," the "gender" portion of the mantra simply serves to obfuscate the realities of human social life.

We are left with "class." And that is a concept that does indeed clarify certain social realities, though not exactly in the sense intended by those who chant the mantra.

In the old days, before the current epidemic of intellectual lunacies descended on academia, American sociologists used the term "stratification" to refer to the phenomenon of ranking in human societies. (College courses that used to have this term in their title are now commonly titled "Inequality"—or, of course, "Race, Class, and Gender.") The term is universally applicable. All human societies are ranked—that is, organized in strata—though the characteristics and the criteria of the different ranks differ considerably. Thus strata may refer to the command of economic resources (to wealth, in the broadest sense), to power, or to status—three privileges of rank that do not necessarily go together. Wealthy individuals may not be powerful, powerful ones may be quite poor, and status may be based on characteristics unrelated to either wealth or power. Also, individuals or groups are assigned to different ranks by different criteria—physical prowess in some societies, descent in many societies, allegiance to a code of conduct in yet other societies.

This is not the place to go into the complexities of what used to be called "stratification theory," but ever since Marx gave a prominent place to "class" in his interpretation of history, there has been general agreement to use this term to refer to a system of ranking in which the command of economic resources is the prevailing criterion. Put simply, a class system is one in which, most of the time, money talks. It does not necessarily purchase power (though, if one wants power, it certainly doesn't hurt to be rich), but it usually can purchase status, if not for oneself then for one's children.

Marx was wrong about many things concerning class, especially about his most cherished class, the proletariat. But he was quite right in his understanding of how class triumphed in European history over earlier forms of ranking. Money did not always talk the way it has since the rise of capitalism. And class had to struggle hard against the stratification system of the *ancien régime*, which was based, not on money, but on descent and honor. As capitalism triumphed, these earlier criteria of rank increasingly paled in significance, naturally to the immense chagrin of those who had claims to them. This too is a complex and fascinating topic that cannot be pursued here. But one point can be made very succinctly: Class, more than any other system of ranking, frees individuals from the accident of birth.

Another old-fashioned distinction of pre-1960s sociology is useful here—that between ascription and achievement. In most human societies before the advent of modern capitalism rank was ascribed—that is, it was based on what an individual *was*, and not on what he *did*. The traditional Hindu caste system was the most perfect form of ascribed ranking: An individual's place in the social hierarchy was fixed at

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birth and, at least in principle, remained immutable throughout his life (at any rate, in *this* life—the Hindu idea that social mobility could occur in future incarnations is, alas, beyond the scope of sociology). But birth and descent were also of crucial importance in the social orders of feudalism and the *ancien régime*. Here too the game was essentially fixed at birth, with only slim chances of changing the odds by means of this or that effort.

By contrast, a class system, while it does not do away with the advantages or disadvantages of birth, leaves enormously more room for achievement. An Untouchable had no chance of becoming a Brahmin, and a member of the lower feudal orders had few opportunities to make it into the aristocracy, but the poor in a class society have at least a reasonable chance of making it into the middle class and some middle-class individuals do make it into the ranks of the rich. Of all the empirically available stratification systems, class allows for the highest degree of social mobility (upward as well as downward). It is a *relatively* open system. This openness is not unrelated to what people, in ordinary parlance, mean by freedom.

The ideal of equality, even if it were desirable (which I, for one, am not at all sure of), is empirically unattainable. The options are between different systems of inequality. The most violent project of creating an egalitarian society, the Communist one, managed to create a grossly inegalitarian society that curiously resembled feudalism, with the party elite playing the role of the old aristocracy. By comparison both with it and with other possibilities of social hierarchy, class appears relatively benign. Its harshnesses can be softened by political means. Its openness goes well with economic development and with democratic politics. Three cheers for class? Hardly. But, in an imperfect world, two cheers would seem to be in order.

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Almost Taking Eucharist

(at the funeral mass of a friend's mother)

First of all, I am protestant.
I protest everything: sanctuaries that echo,
robes that billow, mothers who die.
Especially mothers who die.

Second, I am Scottish. That bagpiping
of Amazing Grace in my left ear
conjures in my soul a heath-buried
ancestor who grins, using my lips.

Third, I once shared an office with her firstborn,
making headlines and junk mail. We listened to the loud
of Violent Femmes and Jethro Tull: "You
can excommunicate me on my way to Sunday School."

Because of this or in spite of this, I almost walk
the ten yards to the man in the dress. And I almost
register a protest with the painted Jesus hunched
in the concavity that joins wall and ceiling.

Hunched as I hunch in the varnished pew,
trying to mumble any one of ninety-five theses.

Bill Stadick

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The Soul of Man Under Federalism

Wilfred M. McClay

It was not very long ago that most scholars and political observers assumed federalism to be an utterly dead issue—an intellectual relic every bit as antique as the divine right of kings. Obviously, the political tides of the day have shifted dramatically—though it still remains to be seen how permanently—and have swept federalism back into the forefront of public discussion. Indeed, renewed interest in federalism may well be leading to the most serious reconsideration of the federal idea in our century. And the increasingly thoughtful and impressive performance of so many of the nation's governors, both individually and in the context of organizations like the National Governors' Association, suggests that they (rather than national politicians) have become the class act of American politics.

None of which, however, ensures that the federal idea will fare better this time around. There remains the perennial argument that a full-fledged federal system is simply no longer practical for an economically, politically, and socially consolidated nation whose inhabitants change their place of residence every five years, a nation that finds itself competing in a global economy of unprecedented scope and complexity. In these days it is hard enough to defend the viability of the nation-state itself against its many detractors, left and right, who cheerfully proclaim its obsolescence. To defend federalism seems even more of a stretch.

Americans' collective sense of federalism, moreover, seems to have atrophied seriously. Tocqueville marveled that even the humblest of the Americans he met in the 1830s were, so to speak, instinctive federalists, readily able to distinguish among the respective obligations of the national, state, and local governments. It is hard to imagine that even fairly well-educated Americans of today would be similarly confident in their knowledge of which courts have jurisdiction over a particular legal issue, or which level or agency of government should provide them with the services they desire. In many Americans' minds federalism seems an abstract concern, at best: Who cares, they are likely to ask, what agency or level of government outlaws (for example) the possession of firearms in schools, so long as the right thing is done? And, at worst, the championing of federalism is associated with memories of the South's invocation of state sovereignty to defend slavery and racial segregation—a heavy burden to bear.

A genuine revival of federalism thus has its work cut out for it. To be sure, it will not have to start from scratch, because the necessary institutions are still, by and large, in place—a piece of good fortune that the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe can only envy. But at the same time, such a revival may not be able to presume an American citizenry with the same dispositions of intellect and character that prevailed 170 years ago. Like any other system of government, a genuine and sustainable federal system must be able to draw on, and in turn reproduce, a certain social character in its citizens. It is an open question whether the American system at present can make either claim.

Hence the focus expressed in my title, which takes off from the title of a little book by Oscar Wilde, published in 1891, called *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*. The structure of his title might seem to suggest that the flower-toting Wilde grasped the close connection between the character of a political regime and the character of those it governs. But Wilde esteemed socialism simply because he believed it would free all individuals from the tiresome prospect of having to think about all material and social things—indeed, about anyone or anything but themselves. Under conditions of private property, he argued, there had been only a handful of true individ-

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uals, men able to realize their personality more or less completely—and these were artists, figures like Shelley, Byron, Browning, Hugo, and Baudelaire. All others were constrained by the necessities of getting and spending, and by "the sordid necessity of living for others." But socialism would change all that, freeing men and women from the labor that saps and misdirects their strength, and enabling their "true personality" to develop without hindrance, growing "naturally and simply, flower-like, or as a tree grows."

Nowhere does Wilde suggest that the social order, or the institutions of government, or any other potentially constraining or cohesive forces might be needed to play a role in the proper formation of this precious, flower-like self. Not for him was James Madison's famous dictum that government is "the greatest of all reflections on human nature." Instead, the political regime would seem to have nothing to do with the process of self-realization—except in so far as it may interfere with it. Government has but one prosaic job: it is to be the central organizer of labor, and of the manufacture and distribution of goods. But once that dreary, and largely self-evident, task is taken care of, government should get out of the way of blossoming personalities. "The form of government that is most suitable to . . . artists," declared Wilde, "is no government at all." And indeed, in Wilde's melding of socialism with high aestheticism and romanticism, art is "the most intense mode of Individualism that the world has known." Even the supreme exemplar, Jesus Christ, was a kind of wandering cafe artist, a free-spirited sage of nonconformity who encouraged his followers to "be themselves," and pay no heed to how the world regards them. In Wilde's revisionist eyes, Christ was the ultimate individualist, whose ultimate message was: "You have a wonderful personality. Develop it."

It would, I suppose, be quarrelsome to ask Wilde how he reconciled all this individual liberty with his turning over of the whole economy to the state. An artist can't be bothered with trivia. It is more to our present purpose, anyway, to make a different point: Wilde's understanding of individualism made no concession to the idea that human beings are formed in association and interaction with one another—in families, communities, and nations—and that even artists like Oscar Wilde are constrained to work within the quintessentially social instrument of language and write for audiences made up of other people. He placed his faith in a religion of art; and a religion of art is, at bottom, a religion of the self, a religion whose values are self-created and self-validated. In that sense, as the late Christopher Lasch observed, Wilde's vision actually has proved far more enduring than the more formidable "isms" that bestrode the nineteenth century. His world eerily resembles certain aspects of our world today, with its worship of the autonomous artist-self who transvalues values, scorns convention, constructs his own identity, and bowls alone, if ever.

Despite his book's promising title, Wilde spelled out no direct relationship between the character of the polity and the kind of souls it produced, except insofar as the former stays out of the way of the latter. In his view, good government is like good indoor plumbing: it keeps life's uglier things out of our line of vision. But what escaped Wilde's attention was explored in an explicit way by Tocqueville, who predicted several years before Wilde was born that there would be a close correlation between the rise of centralization and of atomistic individualism in modern democracies. Precisely because Tocqueville did not take individual autonomy to be a "natural" or normative standard, he was able to see that Wilde's goal of expressive individualism rests upon a peculiar set of social and institutional arrangements, in which the individual gains consumer sovereignty and expressive liberty at the cost of his citizenship and his stake in the common pursuit of the common good.

The putative antagonism between expressive individualism and centralized bureaucracy—or as I have expressed it, between "The Hipster and the Organization Man" (FIRST THINGS, May 1994)—turns out to be not an opposition but a mutually sustaining partnership. It is precisely in a world governed by large, impersonal, centralized bureaucracies that an "emotivist" self (which reduces all moral reasoning to questions of personal preference) is most likely to arise—precisely because such a self is cut off from the kind of responsible contacts and deliberative institutions that make up the school of public life. In short, Wilde was more right than he knew in positing that a certain kind of centralized regime produced a certain kind of unhousebroken individual.

But the naturalness or desirability of unhousebroken souls, and of the big centralizing government that begets them, has now become a more questionable proposition—and this is where the current interest in a revived federalism enters the picture. A growing disenchantment with the pathologies of the unencumbered self has been one of the chief forces fueling the revival of interest in the concept of *citizenship*. But hortatory talk of reviving citizenship is only a beginning. The current mood of reform needs an institutional component if it is to enjoy any success. It will not be enough to emphasize the need for "civic virtue," that is, for a restoration of the beliefs, habits, and behaviors that make citizenship and ordered liberty possible. It will also be necessary to give serious attention to what is being called "devolution," to the extent that devolution is dedicated to the re-creation or preservation of the kind of proximate contexts within which the public virtues of citizens can be formed and liberty can be ordered. Given this imperative, we need to pose the question, What sorts of people are required, and fostered, by federalism?

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What sorts of dispositions and aspirations does a federal system encourage or discourage? What qualities of character does it esteem or disesteem? What, in short, might the soul of man under federalism look like?

At its heart, federalism is an attempt to reconcile opposites, to find a balance between the considerable advantages of national combination and the equally considerable virtues of autonomy and small-scale organization, without having to choose finally between one and the other. But the specific terms in which that balance can be struck have varied widely, for "federalism" has not always meant what Americans take it to mean today. I am *not* using federalism here in its strict sense, as designating a confederation of sovereign constituent states. Instead, I use it in its modern and American sense, designating a government that James Madison accurately presented in *Federalist* 39 as a "composition" of federal and national elements. Such an arrangement differs dramatically from the minimalist federalism of the premodern world, in which the federal entity was not regarded as a true unit of government since it did not deal directly with the internal character of the polity, or the governing of its citizenry. It may be more accurate to call the American system a form of "decentralist-federalism" (as Martin Diamond suggested) to indicate the independent dignity and ultimate primacy of the national union.

Nevertheless, the ambiguities and historical resonances that complicate the word "federalism" have their uses. They preserve the awareness that this new American federal union did not entirely reject an older conviction—associated with Montesquieu, but also rooted deeply in classical antiquity—that the small, autonomous community is the proper seedbed of republican virtue. The U.S. Constitution was born in fundamental political debate, and its final form shows the impress of the contending factions it was designed to reconcile. Indeed, as Herbert Storing rightly emphasized, the views of the Constitution's opponents faithfully trail the Constitution's path like the tail of a comet. The opposition was worried about the Constitution's inattention to the question of the sources of republican virtue, fearing that moral declension would befall any community that based itself solely upon the pursuit of self-interest, however cleverly channelled and controlled. They believed, as Storing put it, that "the American polity had to be a moral community if it was to be anything" and they feared that the Constitution took for granted the perpetuation of a virtuous citizenry actively involved in civic life.

This exalted conception of citizenship is central to the classical understanding of republicanism, and entails a view of human nature completely at odds with Wilde's premises of modern life. It presumes that human life has a proper end, and that for an individual to realize his human nature in all its fullness, he must involve himself intensively in the affairs of civic life. Indeed, it seems anachronistic to speak of the "individual" or the "self" in this context, since the deepest sources of one's identity were social. The republican ideal was, as J. G. A. Pocock succinctly explains it, "a civic and patriot ideal in which the personality was founded in property, perfected in citizenship, but perpetually threatened by corruption." In this vision, civic life is not only the soul's true end, but an arena in which it is instructed in its higher nature.

It is well to remember, however, some less pleasant things about classical republicanism. Pocock himself observes that "the ideal of virtue is highly compulsive," for it "demands of the individual, under threat to his moral being, that he participate in the *res publica*." The soul of man under classical republicanism forswears Wildean vices, but forswears a great deal of liberty besides. The pleasures and satisfactions of commerce, of the arts and sciences, of luxury, of entrepreneurship, of religious devotion, of private life, of cultivating one's own garden—all these must give way to a vision that, taken to its extreme, makes virtuous political activity the alpha and omega of existence. Denying us sanctuary for reflection and space for enterprise, such a regime seems to condemn us to a hellish round of school-board meetings and Kiwanis breakfasts, sewers and landfills—to constant attention to the indoor plumbing. If it is a grave error to assume that human beings are by nature pure and unencumbered individuals, it is equally an error to assert that their life in the polity exhausts who and what they are.

The proper federal settlement, then, needs to find a way to give scope to individual ambition, to economic energy and dynamism, to the "bourgeois" virtues of a liberal democracy, while respecting and upholding the role that acts of citizenship, and public life in general, play in the deepening and elevation of the soul. This was one of the chief preoccupations of Tocqueville, who explored whether self-interest, rightly understood, could be made to take the place of virtue. He was confident it could; at any rate, he thought we had no choice but to try to make it work. But he also never ceased worrying about what might happen if it didn't. It is sometimes not sufficiently appreciated that Tocqueville's famous critique of American individualism refers not to individualism as we today might understand the term, but to *privatism*, to the wholesale withdrawal of the individual from public life—the strong tendency in democratic societies for "each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends." Such individualism was in Tocqueville's view an even more ominous threat to a civilized and self-governing polity than was the tyranny of the majority.

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Tocqueville too, then, greatly exalted the title of "citizen," and saw political life as an indispensable school of the soul, where individuals are gradually drawn out of themselves through immersion in public life and grow into more enriching and elevating connection with their fellows. Eventually, he believed, the habit of virtuous behavior, even if initiated for entirely self-interested reasons, could take hold and in due course give rise to something very similar to the original virtue itself. But he did not make the mistake of thinking that behavior and attitude could be compelled by exhortation alone. There must be an *institutional* framework of rewards and reinforcements. There must be arenas for meaningful acts of citizenship. Fortunately, he believed, the American framers took care to "infuse political life into each portion of the territory in order to multiply to an infinite extent opportunities of acting in concert for all the members of the community."

In other words, Tocqueville saw in the federal idea a way that Americans could retain the spirit of republican citizenship even when embracing the self-interested dynamism of liberal individualism. In so doing, Americans were in effect reconciling the essential principles of both classical and modern political thought. This did not mean that Tocqueville took a doctrinaire view of precisely how political authority should be subdivided; and it certainly did not mean that he opposed an energetic national government with broad responsibilities. But he did understand that political communities, if they are to have any real moral vitality, must find ways to spur their inhabitants on to the free exercise of their highest natures and provide them public spaces in which they can do so. It must permit them—and require them—to be citizens. This need not mean, to be sure, turning foreign affairs over to the plowman, who was never very interested in them anyway. Indeed, the federal principle has little in common with the growing plebiscitary tendency in American politics, since it favors the careful discrimination of appropriate spheres of responsibility and esteems solid local knowledge over pseudo-cosmopolitan "opinion"—particularly the ill-informed opinions generated by mass media and measured by pollsters. By permitting citizens maximum freedom and scope in the administration of minor and local affairs, one draws them into public life by giving them a genuine, palpable stake in it.

Writers from Aristotle to Montesquieu insisted that a republic had to stay relatively small, because only a small polity could possess sufficient social and moral commonality to be self-governing. And though James Madison argued that an "extended republic" could more effectively control the tendency toward faction in popular governments, he also insisted that the jurisdiction of the central government be "limited to certain enumerated objects," with the states and localities retaining "their due authority and activity." Indeed, he speculated that were the Constitution to abolish the states, the general government would soon be "compelled, by the principle of self-preservation, to reinstate them." He did not assume that a large and diverse nation could offer the same sense of moral community as a small and relatively homogeneous republic (though he did assume that the national perspective would usually be the more elevated and dispassionate one). Rather, he assumed that "a judicious modification and mixture of the *federal principle*" could combine the advantages of both.

For today's politicians to fulfill the spirit of Madison's words, they may now have to move in the opposite direction—away from the relentless centralizing trends of the past century and toward institutional arrangements that seek to multiply the opportunities for public association. Acts of public association take place within a sphere that is clearly delimited and contained, making of citizenship a sustained and reciprocal activity. The challenge is to find ways of restoring the sense of accountability and belonging offered by smaller, more human-scale institutions, institutions that can serve as schools of citizenship while retaining the benefits of national government. This is precisely the promise of federalism. It does not require us to renounce a national government, only to specify and enforce its limits. And it does so not only to limit the power of national government—though that was clearly one of the Framers' chief intentions—but to preserve kinds of association, and therefore qualities of soul, that are beyond the power of nationalism to sustain.

There are, however, plenty of hard questions to be asked. Perhaps the hardest one, a question that immediately arises when one contemplates the elimination or reform of certain national entitlements, is: Does devolution have the capacity to generate civic virtue where it does not currently exist? Or, instead, does civic virtue have to be already present in order for devolution to be successful, or for it to make any sense at all? Can devolution energize the virtue that is already there and transform the lives of those who had lacked virtue? Or will it simply produce even more suffering, squalor, and moral chaos than we already have? And are we really prepared to make the sacrifices entailed in the exercise of civic virtue? Or have we as a people become so habituated to a thousand forms of pleasant (and unpleasant) dependency that we are now incapable of this kind of austere moral assertion and have entirely lost our taste for self-governance?

Perhaps, however, an excessive emphasis upon republicanism exaggerates the role of citizenship, and diminishes the role of religion, in the inculcation and perpetuation of virtue. Most of the Founders were convinced of the indispensability of religion as a bulwark of public and personal morality, and they frequently used the word "virtue" in ways that did not

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necessarily suggest an allusion to strictly classical antecedents. Indeed, one of the remarkable features of the Founders' discourse is the ease with which they employed a variety of political vocabularies—republican, liberal, and Protestant Christian, ancient and modern—in expressing their convictions on issues of civic virtue. They had an enviable and quintessentially American eclecticism, an ability to extract and incorporate whatever was valuable in a political language or system of ideas without being imprisoned by its totality. The case for public virtue could, in their view, be argued as persuasively on grounds of religious piety or of educated self-interest as it could on grounds of civic obligation. Indeed, one could do all three, and sometimes did, without feeling the least incompatibility among them.

There are considerable advantages inherent in such a mixed moral discourse, including a built-in Madisonian defense against the excesses to which any one language might be susceptible in isolation. And these very advantages offer us a clue to one of the most salient features of the soul of man under American federalism. By attempting to accommodate within a single overarching structure what are in fact different principles of government, traceable ultimately to different views of human nature, the federal system demands of its adherents extraordinary powers of discrimination. They will need a highly developed ability to distinguish what laws and actions are appropriate to each given sphere, an ability to distinguish between and among different spheres of possible activity—and in so doing, to grasp and distinguish the different axial principles appropriate to each.

Although this description suggests that federalism should be understood as part of the great tendency toward functional differentiation so characteristic of modernity—and in a sense it is—in fact the federal idea owes its distinctiveness to a different source. Liberalism rests upon the principle of separation of spheres of activity: religious, social, political, economic, cultural, familial. (We owe, for example, our conception of "the market" as an independent economic institution standing outside the network of social, kinship, religious, and cultural ties to such pluralism.) But to the extent that American federalism manages to keep its republican component alive, it contains within itself a holistic countercurrent and counterargument to this very pluralism—an institutionalized recognition of the fact that, when we act as citizens, we refine and fulfill something in our nature that can be touched in no other way.

If this is right, then federalism entails a very complex vision of the human soul, one that requires us to be forever balancing not only contending external interests, but competing understandings of what it means to be most fully human. And there is every reason to believe that these dualities will be unstable and shifting, rather than resting once and for all in a grand equipoise, or even as "a machine that will run of itself." Individuals in a federal system must have the ability to operate mentally on more than one track, recognizing sometimes the principle of virtue, sometimes the principle of interest (or of maximizing utility), sometimes the principle of liberty, and sometimes the principle of pious obedience—disdaining none, but granting none a trump of all the others.

There is something in all this that does not come naturally, that goes against the grain. It is not for nothing that the word "integrity" has such a high standing in our language; by and large, we trust singleness of mind and purpose, and distrust multiplicity, which we often reduce to duplicity. Purity of heart, said Kierkegaard, is to will one thing. But it is precisely that wish to be devoted to only one thing—that passion for unity, that yearning for the consecrated life—that the federal idea requires us to resist, though, paradoxically, it also requires that we leave a respectful space for such needs.

In a superficial sense, the federal idea would seem to be oddly in tune with the mood of postmodernism, with its antagonism to "totalizing" systems of thought and its hostility to unitary ideas of human agency and personality. But that similarity is only seeming. Any modern federalism will ultimately be reliant upon the structure of a sturdy constitutionalism, which clearly fixes the very boundaries and spheres within which the play of contending forces is allowed to take place. It will emphasize the importance of sturdy institutions, as vessels designed to contain and direct the plural forces that federal arrangements unleash.

Indeed, federalism inevitably places an extraordinarily high premium upon something that has gotten a bad press from all directions in recent years: *procedure*. Not only does it assert that it makes a great deal of difference whether we do the right things in the wrong ways. It even calls into question the easy distinction that is so often made between procedure and substance—for in a federal system, in many cases procedure *is* substance. The Latin roots of the word "federalism" suggest this, since they point to the element of *trust*, embodied in the making of contracts, treaties, leagues, and compacts. At the heart of a federal system is the willingness to entrust some portion of governance to those to whom it is delegated or assigned—recognizing that the opportunity for citizenship is itself a political good of the highest order.

Yet for all the sturdiness of such constitutionalism, there is in federalism a recognition of a kind of restlessness and mystery and indecisiveness at the heart of American political life—as if many of the most important questions remain open and unsettled. To express this, I can hardly improve on the words of political scientist Martin Diamond, one of the most thoughtful students of American federalism, in his

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essay "The Ends of Federalism":

> The distinguishing characteristic of federalism is the peculiar ambivalence of the ends men seek to make it serve. The ambivalence is quite literal: Federalism is always an arrangement pointed in two contrary directions or aimed at securing two contrary ends. . . . Hence any given federal structure is always the institutional expression of the contradiction or tension between the particular reasons the member units have for remaining small and autonomous but not wholly, and large and consolidated but not quite. The differences among federal systems result from the differences of these pairs of reasons for wanting federalism.

There is wisdom in this ambivalence. And the fact that such wisdom emerged out of an intensely political process takes not a thing away from it. Historians are prone to the genetic fallacy, to believe that an account of something's origin is a full account of its nature. It is particularly easy, when looking at the U.S. Constitution, to see only the seams and fault lines of compromise—large states against small states, North against South, landed wealth against personalty, and so on. It is also easy to see those compromises as mere way stations on the inevitable path to a powerful national union, of a sort that the Articles of Confederation—an example of old-style federalism—could never have produced.

But there is more to the story of the Constitution than an understanding of it as an attempt to produce a powerful national union, which was held back for a while in certain respects by various bands of nervous nellies and self-interested parties. The American style of federalism, for all of its ad hoc qualities, tried to do something very grand by attempting to balance virtue and interest and arrive at a form of liberty that incorporates both ancient and modern understandings of political life. In an age that pretends to worship diversity, that should be reason enough to look to the federal idea with new respect as an idea that attempts to accommodate and reconcile the respective strengths of a variety of ideas about human nature and human society.

It does not necessarily require us to turn back the clock, as critics so often charge, and undo the past century and a half. A fairer criticism, however, might be that it attempts something akin to squaring the circle, or reconciling the incompatible. That may well be so. But it is equally true that the soul of man under nationalism (or Wilde's socialism) leaves a great deal to be desired, quite as much—to move to the opposite end of the spectrum—as does the soul of man under pure localism, or pre-political tribalism. Federalism proposes an avenue of escape from the constrictions of this dilemma. But it does so at the cost of imposing a high order of complexity in thought and action upon its citizenry. To be sure, in political life everything has its price, and every live option has its problematic dimensions. What is not clear is whether Americans are prepared to pay the price of such complexity. If not, then there will no doubt be other prices to be paid. Indeed, we are already paying them. F·1

Full Moon

after Rilke

Put out my eyes, I can see your face.
Close my ears, I can hear your voice.
Take my feet, I will not forget the way.
Take my mouth, and your name will still be on my lips.
Break these arms, and you will find me holding
you with this heart as if it were a hand.
Make my heart stop, and my brain will start to pound.
And if you set fire to my brain,
I carry you like water in my blood.

Steven Lautermilch

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How to Think About Secularism

Wolfhart Pannenberg

Whatever is meant by secularization, few will dispute that in this century the public culture has become less religious. This is not, as some suggest, simply the result of the separation of church and state that first happened some two centuries earlier. Such separation did not then entail the alienation of culture from its religious roots. In America, for instance, the end of state-established religion did not mean the end of the predominantly Christian and Protestant character of American culture. In other Western societies, the linkage between the state and one or another Christian church continued to be effective well into this century. Yet in these societies, too, we see evidence of secularization, typically much further advanced than in the United States. Secularization is not caused by the separation of church and state. The roots of the process of secularization, resulting in the present alienation of public culture from religion, and especially from Christianity, are planted in the seventeenth century.

A public climate of secularism undermines the confidence of Christians in the truth of what they believe. In *A Rumor of Angels* (1969), Peter L. Berger describes believers as a "cognitive minority" whose standards of knowledge deviate from what is publicly taken for granted. Berger wrote about "plausibility structures." People need social support in holding that a given account of reality is plausible. When such support is weakened, people need to muster a strong personal determination in order to maintain beliefs that are out of line with the beliefs of others around them. Berger's is a social and psychological analysis of the situation in which people find themselves, quite apart from the truth of what they may believe. "It is, of course, possible to go against the social consensus that surrounds us," Berger notes, "but there are powerful pressures (which manifest themselves as psychological pressures within our own consciousness) to conform to the views and beliefs of our fellow men." This is precisely the experience of Christians living in a dominantly secular culture.

In a secular milieu, even an elementary knowledge of Christianity—its history, teachings, sacred texts, and formative figures—dwindles. It is no longer a matter of rejecting Christian teachings; large numbers of people have not the vaguest knowledge of what those teachings are. This is a remarkable development when one considers how foundational Christianity is to the entire story of Western culture. The more widespread the ignorance of Christianity, the greater the prejudice against Christianity. Thus people who do not know the difference between Saul of Tarsus and John Calvin are quite certain that Christianity has been tried and convicted as a religion of oppression. When such people do get interested in religion or "spirituality"—their interest being a natural reaction to the shallowness of a secularist culture—they frequently turn not to Christianity but to "alternative religions."

In this cultural circumstance, it is not easy to communicate the Christian message. The difficulty is exacerbated by the cultural relativizing of the very idea of truth. This is a very significant change from the secularism of the Enlightenment. The secularist thinkers of the Enlightenment challenged Christians to justify their truth claims by rational argument rather than by simple appeal to religious authority. But both Christians and their opponents assumed that there was a truth about the matters in dispute. That cannot be assumed today. In the view of many, including many Christians, Christian doctrines are merely opinions that may or may not be affirmed according to individual preference, or depending on whether they speak to personally felt needs.

The dissolution of the idea of truth—of truth that

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does not need my approval in order to be true—severely undercuts the Christian understanding of evangelization or mission. Missionary proclamation was once understood as bringing the truth to others, and was therefore both legitimate and extremely important. For many today, the missionary enterprise is a matter of imposing our personal preferences and culturally conditioned prejudices upon others, and is therefore not only illegitimate but morally offensive. Beyond the question of missions, we might ask ourselves why people should embrace the Christian faith unless they think that the apostolic teaching is true. More precisely, today the question is whether it is even meaningful to claim that Christian teaching is true. The idea of truth is absolutely vital for the Christian faith. The destruction of that idea is key to legitimating a secularist culture, since the idea of truth touches on secularism's greatest vulnerability.

II

Secularism and, more comprehensively, modernity itself have sometimes been depicted as the consequence of apostasy from the Christian faith. That was the view of, for instance, the great Swiss Protestant theologian Karl Barth. According to Barth, modern culture has been a revolt against the Christian faith aimed at putting the human being in the place of God. There is much to be said for that interpretation, for the human reality has indeed become basic in modern culture in a manner comparable to the religious foundation of earlier cultures. The concern for human rights is but one aspect, although the politically most important aspect, of modernity's preoccupation with man. Thus it came about that the human individual was seen as the highest value and criterion of good.

It is doubtful, however, that this development should be dismissed in its entirety as an instance of apostasy. It may well be argued that the strong emphasis on the human person has a distinctly Christian origin. In this respect, Christianity has a great deal in common with the modern spirit. One may even suggest that the modern spirit contributed to liberating Christian consciousness from the distortion of intolerance. In other words, the relationship between the Christian faith and modernity is ambivalent, and does not permit Christians to reject modernity in an unqualified manner. Although modern culture in its secularist turn no doubt contributed to alienating many people from the Christian faith, it is necessary for Christians to learn and remember the lesson taught by the rise of modernity, and to incorporate that lesson in the Christian consciousness.

The distinction between the secular realm and the realm called religious or spiritual is nothing new in Christian history. In earlier centuries, however, that distinction did not amount to a separation of the secular—politics, economics, law, education, arts—from the spiritual influence of the Church. To the contrary, the very distinction between the secular and religious had a Christian basis. That Christian basis was the awareness that the existing social order was imperfect and provisional; it was not yet the kingdom of God. With respect to any existing social order, Christianity provided an eschatological modesty. This set Christian societies apart from other religiously imbued cultures such as Islam. It distinguished the Byzantine Empire from the empire of pre-Christian Rome. In the post-Constantinian period there was a balance between the authority of the bishops and that of the emperor, while in ancient Rome the emperor himself was the highest priest, *pontifex maximus*.

The distinction between the religious and the secular changed again as a result of the sixteenth-century Reformation or, more precisely, as a result of the religious wars that followed the breakup of the medieval Church. When in a number of countries no religious party could successfully impose its faith upon the entire society, the unity of the social order had to be based on a foundation other than religion. Moreover, religious conflict had proved to be destructive of the social order. In the second half of the seventeenth century, therefore, thoughtful people decided that, if social peace was to be restored, religion and the controversies associated with religion would have to be bracketed. In that decision was the birth of modern secular culture. It would in time lead to secular*ism* and a culture that is properly described as secularist.

In earlier centuries, the bracketing of religion would have been unimaginable. Even in the sixteenth century, Reformers and Catholics alike assumed that religious unity was indispensable to the unity of society. Although they emphasized the decisive importance of the individual conscience in matters of faith, neither Luther nor Calvin conceived of the possibility of religious toleration. The step toward religious freedom and toleration was first taken in the Netherlands, near the end of the sixteenth century, in order to restore peace between Catholic and Protestant sectors of the population. When William of Orange proclaimed the principle of religious toleration, he thought he was acting in line with Luther's teaching about the appeal to conscience and the liberty of the Christian. In fact, William had taken a decisive step toward a thorough reconstruction of the social order and of culture itself.

The older assumption that the unity of society requires the unity of religion was not unsupported by good reasons. If citizens are to obey the law and respect the authority of civil government, they must believe that it is morally right to do so, that they are not simply submitting to the caprice of those in power. If power is to be deemed legitimate, it must be exercised in the name of some authority that is beyond human arbitrariness and manipulation. Reli-

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gion obliged and constrained those in power as well as those over whom power is exercised. In such an order, the subject and the ruler sense that they are united in their responsibility to an authority that is above both.

Today such a view of moral legitimacy and the social order seems antique. That older view, however, was not rejected because it had been refuted by argument. Rather, it was abandoned for pragmatic reasons: the urgent need to restore social peace in the face of bloody religious conflicts overrode other considerations. In the absence of religious ways of legitimating government, alternative theories were developed. Most important among these is the idea of representative government. Still today, however, the plausibility of these theories of legitimation rests more upon pragmatic considerations than upon convincing argument.

III

After the wars of religion, the religious foundation of society, law, and culture was replaced by another, and that new foundation was called human nature. Thus there arose systems of natural law, natural morality, and even natural religion. And, of course, there was a natural theory of government, presented in the form of social contract theories. Such theories demonstrated the need for civil government in order to secure individual survival at the price of the natural freedom of individuals (e.g., Hobbes), or in order to secure individual freedom within the limits of reason and law (e.g., Locke). Theories using human nature as the foundation of the political, legal, and cultural order made it possible for European nations to put an end to the period of religious warfare. They also made possible, perhaps inevitable, the autonomy of a secular society and culture determinedly independent from the influence of church and religious tradition.

The foregoing account of the rise of the secular social order is associated with Wilhelm Dilthey. There are other theories of course. Perhaps best known is Max Weber's account of the origins of modern capitalism. According to Weber, modern capitalism was not produced by purely economic factors but arose from the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and its influence on human conduct. Calvin taught that, although God's eternal decree ordaining the election or repudiation of the individual remains mysterious, whether a particular person is elect can be surmised from his conduct. If he does the works of regeneration, it is likely such a person belongs to the chosen. For the Calvinist, then, there was a powerful motivation to live in a manner befitting the regenerate. In one's worldly vocation, in conscientious observation of the duties to which one is called, one bore witness to regeneration. And so it was, Weber argued, that the rational asceticism of the early capitalists had its source in the otherworldly hope of Calvinist spirituality. That spirituality was secularized, however, when the dedication it engendered was put in the service of the multiplication of capital. Eventually, according to Weber, this produced a capitalist system that functions in a manner quite independent of the religious motivation that gave it birth.

Other theories of secularization have claimed that the modern belief in progress is a secularization of Christian eschatological hope. The hope for a better world is no longer directed toward another world, but becomes the human project to improve this world. Karl Löwith argued that the modern *philosophy* of history is in fact a secularization of the Christian *theology* of history; it is a secularized version of the history of salvation. The providence of God guiding the historical process toward eschatological fulfillment is replaced by a philosophy of progress guided by the predictive power of science and technology and promising a future of worldly happiness. Science secularized the theological idea of law by turning it into the idea of the eternal laws of nature, and the idea of an infinite universe was the secularized version of an earlier belief in the infinity of God.

In these and other theories, a religious content is transformed into something immanent and thisworldly. Hans Blumenberg is among those who have objected to such theories because they put modern culture under obligation to its Christian past; they suggest that the real substance of modern culture belongs originally and most truly to Christianity. Against that view, Blumenberg argued that modernity had emancipated itself from the oppressive claims of the Christian religion. Not Christian vestiges but human autonomy formed the core of the modern mind. In fact, however, this position is not so far removed from the theorists of secularization discussed above. They, too, believed that the religious legacy had been transformed into something radically new—as radically new as one might expect when humanity replaces God at the center.

There is, however, a fateful flaw in both positions. The one side claims that processes of secularization are responsible for the transition from medieval to modern culture. The other explains that transition in terms of emancipation from a religiously dominated culture. Both view the rise of modern culture as a primarily ideological process. The reality, I am arguing, is that the transition in question was not, or at least not chiefly, ideologically driven. It was religious civil war and the destruction of social peace that made it necessary to abandon the older idea that public culture must be based upon religious unity. Every effort to settle the conflicts between religious parties had been in vain. Those who tried to cope with this circumstance did not think that they were turning away from the Christian faith in their effort to find a more stable basis for the social order. With

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relatively few exceptions, they understood themselves to be devout Christians, and would have been scandalized by the thought that they were depriving Christian truth claims and morality of public influence.

Put differently, the modern emancipation from religion was not the intention but the long-term result of reconstituting society on a foundation other than religious faith. No break with Christianity was intended by those who based public culture on conceptions of human nature rather than religion. In fact, Christian ideas continued to be socially effective, although they were gradually transmogrified into secularized beliefs, and it is not surprising that, in time, many people forgot where the ideas came from in the first place.

In thinking about the relationship between Christianity and modern culture, it is important to keep these factors in mind: first, modernity at the outset was not opposed to the Christian faith; second, the lack of tolerance among Christians in the post-Reformation period was directly responsible for the rise of a secularist culture. What Christians should learn from this is the urgency of overcoming their inherited controversies and of restoring some form of unity among themselves. In addition, the idea and practice of tolerance must be incorporated into the Christian understanding not only of freedom but of truth itself. Without these changes—changes that only Christians can bring about—it is quite unreasonable to expect modern culture to reconsider the exclusion of religion from the public square. The memory of the role of religion in the origins of modernity powerfully reinforces the contemporary prejudice that religion in the public square is divisive, intolerant, and destructive of civil society.

IV

Very much at the heart of modern culture we find ambiguities that result from a sometimes curious admixture of Christian and non-Christian ideas. The most important example is the modern idea of freedom. There is a clearly Christian root in the belief that all human persons are born to be free and that such freedom should be respected. There is the biblical teaching that human beings are created in the image of God and created to enjoy communion with God. In fact, it is only communion with God that actually makes us free, according to Jesus (John 8:36) and Paul (2 Corinthians 3:17). While every human being is created to enjoy the freedom that comes from communion with God, it is only in Christ that such freedom is fully realized through redemption from sin and death. Such is the Christian idea of freedom.

The modern idea of freedom, most effectively proposed by John Locke, differs from the Christian view in that it focuses only on the natural condition of man. It differs also in drawing upon ancient Stoic ideas of natural law. The Stoics taught that the original freedom and equality of human beings in the state of nature was lost because of the necessities of living in society. Locke thought that the Reformation doctrine of the freedom of the Christian made it possible to reclaim that original freedom as an actuality in this life. In contrast to later libertarian views of individual freedom, Locke believed that pure freedom is necessarily united with reason and therefore positively related to law. In Locke's position there is an echo of the Christian understanding that freedom depends on being united with the good and, therefore, with God.

The prevailing idea of freedom in our societies today, of course, is the idea that each person has the right to do as he pleases. Freedom is not connected to any notion of the good as constitutive of freedom itself. Because of the incompleteness of human existence in history, any idea of freedom involves the risk of abuse. But it does make a very big difference whether the distinction between the use and abuse of freedom is observed. When it is observed, it is possible to challenge the equation of freedom with license. The ambiguity built into the modern idea of freedom helps us understand secular culture's ambivalence when it comes to values in general, and our cultural nervousness about affirming the contents and standards by which the culture itself is defined. With respect to values and cultural traditions, as with truth claims, a consumerist attitude prevails. Each chooses according to his preferences or perceived needs. The disengagement of the idea of freedom from an idea of the true and the good is the great weakness of secularist societies.

V

Under the influence of thinkers such as Max Weber, the dominant assumption of modernity has been that secularization will continue to pervade all aspects of social and individual behavior, with religion increasingly pushed to the margins. In the last two or three decades, however, it has become evident that secularization (or, as some prefer, progressive modernization) faces severe problems. The thoroughly secularized social order gives rise to a feeling of meaninglessness: there is a vacuum in the public square of political and cultural life, and this invites violent outbreaks of dissatisfaction. As a consequence, it is hard to predict the future of the secularist society. It depends in part on how long most people will be willing to pay the price of meaninglessness in exchange for the license to do what they want. So long as people feel sure of the comforts of affluence, they may be willing to tolerate these tensions indefinitely. On the other hand, irrational reactions are unpredictable, especially when there is a sense that the institutions of society are not legitimate. The circumstance of modern secular society is

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more precarious than we may want to recognize. Those who recognize the danger call for a reaffirmation of the traditions by which the culture is defined, and most specifically for the reaffirmation of the religious roots of those traditions.

Such a call is no doubt in the self-interest of the secularist society. Religion as such, however, has little stake in whether that call is heeded. Contrary to anxieties widely expressed a few decades ago by people of religious faith, it is now obvious that the future of religion is less precarious than the future of secularist society. Secularization is far from being an unstoppable juggernaut. The more secularization and what is called progressive modernization advance, the more they produce a need for something else that can bestow meaning upon human life. Such meaning, if it is to be effective, must be perceived as given; not given to our lives by ourselves but by some authority beyond our contrivance. The resurgence of religion and quasi-religious movements that started a few decades ago took secularist intellectuals by surprise, but it could have been predicted (and was predicted by some) as an inevitable result of secularism.

This renewed interest in religion, however, has not always turned to Christianity. In some societies, and in sectors of all modern societies, the turn to Christianity seems to be the exception. One reason for this is the prejudice against Christianity as "conventional religion" in the public consciousness of the secularist culture. This helps explain the widespread enthusiasm for "alternative religions." Another reason why many people are interested in any religion but Christianity is found in the way that the churches have responded to the challenge of secularism. And that brings me to my final point: How should churches respond to the secularist culture?

VI

The absolutely worst way to respond to the challenge of secularism is to adapt to secular standards in language, thought, and way of life. If members of a secularist society turn to religion at all, they do so because they are looking for something other than what that culture already provides. It is counterproductive to offer them religion in a secular mode that is carefully trimmed in order not to offend their secular sensibilities. In this connection, it seems that mainline churches in America have yet to internalize the message of Dean Kelley in his book of a quarter century ago, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*. What people look for in religion is a plausible alternative, or at least a complement, to life in a secularist society. Religion that is "more of the same" is not likely to be very interesting.

I hasten to add that this is not an argument for dead traditionalism. The old-fashioned ways of doing things in the churches may include elements that are insufferably boring and empty of meaning. Christianity proposed as an alternative or complement to life in a secularist society must be both vibrant and plausible. Above all, it must be substantively different and propose a difference in how people live. When message and ritual are accommodated, when the offending edges are removed, people are invited to suspect that the clergy do not really believe anything so very distinctive. The plausible and persuasive presentation of Christian distinctives is not a matter of marketing. It is a matter of what the churches owe to people in our secularist societies: the proclamation of the risen Christ, the joyful evidence of new life in Christ, of life that overcomes death.

As this is not an argument for traditionalism (keeping in mind Jaroslav Pelikan's useful observation that tradition is the living faith of the dead while traditionalism is the dead faith of the living), so it is not an argument for fundamentalism. Admittedly, the term fundamentalist is loosely used today to condemn any religion that seriously offends secular sensibilities. But by fundamentalism I mean religion that, in an unwarranted claim to certitude, refuses to engage the human capacity of reason. The opposition of Christian proclamation to the spirit of secularism must always seek an alliance with reason. This is in keeping with the classical Christian tradition that, since the time of the early Church, forged an alliance with reason and true philosophy in order to contend for the universal validity of the Christian teaching.

Secularists are right to expose irrationality, fanaticism, and intolerance when they appear in the name of religion, even if the secularists sometimes do so in order to discredit religion as such. Authentic Christian teaching appropriates all that is valid in the secularist culture, while laying claim to, and focusing attention upon, the truth that the secularist spirit no longer deems worthy of attention. Christians can confidently do this because they know that, just as Christian doctrines were once challenged in the name of reason and a rational approach to truth, so today secularism itself has become irrational. In our contemporary circumstance, there is high promise in renewing the classical alliance between Christian faith and reason.

Christians who lay claim to reason, however, must be ready to accept criticism, and to cultivate an ethos of self-criticism within their own communities. Traditional doctrines and forms of spirituality, along with the Bible itself, are not exempt from critical inquiry. Such inquiry is required by the alliance of faith and reason. Christian confidence in the truth of God and His revelation should be vigorous enough to assume that truth will not succumb to any findings of critical inquiry. Of course there are prejudiced and distorted forms of criticism that presuppose a secularist worldview that is inescapably hostile to Christian faith. For critical inquiry to flourish, such false criticisms must be firmly exposed and resisted. How

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to distinguish between critical inquiry and criticism that has been poisoned by the presuppositions of secularism is a subject for another essay. Suffice it to say that it can be done and it must be done. My argument is that, if we think it is necessary to protect divinely revealed truth from critical inquiry, we are in fact displaying our unbelief. Such inquiry, while it may at times pose difficulties, will finally enhance the splendor of the truth of God. Confidence in that truth—a confidence exhibited in proclamation and life—is the only adequate and worthy response to the challenge of secularism. FT

Regarding a Co-Worker's Kindergarten Report Card

The nun, you said,
bad-marked your report card
because you could not
answer why why why
God made her or you
or them or me.
All jowls and rules,
that woman. As if
the motives of God
were true-false, multiple
choice or kindergarten simple.

—So why did he?

I knew you would ask
and seem to remember penning
the answer somewhere:
the inside of my left wrist,
the toe of my right sneaker
or was it the cardback
of my spiral notebook?
I cannot locate the eternal
plan just now, but I did know.

I really must have.

Just look across my office.
See in the corner of the cluttered, trivial desk
that miracle of smirk playing itself out
on my daughter's kindergarten face.

Bill Stadick

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God and Gender in Judaism

Matthew Berke

Some time this year the Reform movement will issue its new High Holy Day prayerbook, for the first time putting between hard covers a major liturgical work incorporating "gender-sensitive" language. Gender sensitivity is the rubric that for two decades has been used to purge Reform worship of masculine imagery and symbolism and to replace it, gradually, with sexually neutral or (in some cases) explicitly feminine language. This process has not been limited to changing phrases like "God of our fathers" to "God of our ancestors" in the English translation, or even to adding the Hebrew *imoteinu*, "our mothers" (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah), where previously only *avoteinu*, "our fathers" (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), were mentioned. More significantly, Reform liturgists have been altering the God-language of the prayerbook—a course of action with enormous, though largely unexamined, theological implications, not only for the Reform movement but for all of American Judaism.

The new High Holy Day prayerbook, *Gates of Repentance*, is actually a revised version of the 1978 Reform *makhzor* of the same name. (I have seen an advance copy, showing all the blue-pencil markings.) As with the various paperbound services produced by the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) in recent years, most of the changes in God-language are in the English translation—a fact attributable more to caution than religious conviction. (A rabbi prominent in liturgy revisions told me that changes in the Hebrew will be slower in coming, since "Some people seem to think the Hebrew is more sacrosanct.")

Thus, *Adonai* (Lord) is usually rendered as "Eternal One," occasionally as "God," or sometimes is simply left untranslated in the English section; *Melech* (King) yields most often to "Sovereign"; *Avinu* (Our Father) gives way in translation to "Source," "Our Maker," "Our Creator," or "Our Parent." Third-person pronouns referring to God are eliminated by translating them into the second person or by recasting sentences into the passive voice. (Even prior to the written changes, many rabbis have been "editing" the old prayerbooks, replacing every "He" or "His" with a repetition of "God"—e.g., God saw that God's work was good and so God rested from God's work.)

For the most part *Gates of Repentance* employs gender-neutral rather than feminine language. *Avinu Malkeinu* (Our Father, Our King), one of the most venerable and beloved formulations of the Jewish liturgy, is left untranslated in the main text—though an alternative prayer is offered to the *Shekhinah*, the divine spirit, which is traditionally regarded as feminine. The use of explicitly feminine imagery is actually carried further in the CCAR's booklet for S'lichot services, *Gates of Forgiveness* (1993). That service alters both the Hebrew and the English of the *Avinu Malkeinu* prayer to yield *Avinu Imeinu* (Our Father, Our Mother). Masculine imagery is tolerated, but only (it seems) when it is immediately counterbalanced by feminine language. Later in the same book, balance is abandoned for outright feminization: the *Shekhinah* is invoked as a "Mothering Presence" and "Mother present in all"; a blessing begins, *Barucha At* . . . Blessed are you (feminine) instead of the traditional *Baruch Atah* (masculine).

Gender neutrality is regarded by the CCAR's Liturgy Committee as a transitional style. In five or six years the CCAR plans to revamp *Gates of Prayer*—the Reform *siddur* for Sabbath, weekdays, and festivals—employing a good deal of explicit feminine imagery. It remains to be seen whether this means "Father," "Lord," and "King"—expunged from all the most recent liturgies—will be allowed to come back into prayerbooks for gender balance.

To Jews in other movements, the liturgical

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changes in Reform must seem just another instance of Reform's ultraliberal heresy and *mishegoss* that imitates trends in the secular world and liberal churches. Yet Reform innovation is often an advance indicator of developments in the other branches of Judaism. The Conservative movement, which followed Reform on the ordination of women and has adopted much of Reform's liberal political agenda, has already made some concessions to gender sensitivity in its current prayerbook, and Conservative rabbis are now discussing the possibility of using demasculinized God-language. Orthodoxy is relatively immune to liturgical ferment, but not absolutely so. Increasingly, one finds Orthodox women breaking out of traditional religious roles—undertaking intensive Talmudic studies, forming women's prayer groups, and davening publicly on commuter trains and in airports. As some Orthodox women explore a feminized God-language within the limits of tradition, nondenominational women's minyans venture beyond. Whether the new God-language becomes a source of further division within American Judaism or the basis of a new theological consensus, its assumptions and arguments need to be evaluated more carefully—starting with the Reform case.

The idea behind gender sensitivity is that religious teaching and liturgy should reflect the religious equality of women—as full partners in the covenant and as creatures equally made *b'tselem elohim*, "in the image of God." Many women say they feel excluded by a theological and liturgical vocabulary that is overwhelmingly masculine: they can neither relate to nor find any self-reflection in the awesome, patriarchal God-figure who relies so heavily on power, fear, rules, and hierarchy. To include women in the religious life of the Jewish community, they argue, God must be *re-imaged* in a way that incorporates the feminine aspects of the divine nature.

Liturgical reformers contend that such reimaging is easily accommodated within a traditional Jewish framework. After all, it is argued, the sages insisted that God has no body and is beyond the categories of male and female, incorporating both but limited by neither. The ancient rabbis were aware that God is *eyn sof*—unknowable, unfathomable, indescribable—and they regarded all God-language as approximate and figurative. Even in the Bible itself, as well as in mystical texts and other writings, feminine imagery is occasionally employed to describe God. The dominant imagery is masculine, the revisers claim, only because women have been powerless and marginalized throughout Jewish history; their voices have been silenced by men who have had all the power and who, idolatrously, projected onto God their own male image. This male-centered social construction of God has been a perennial instrument of oppression against women, and serves, even today, to define women as inferior and radically "other"—religiously, culturally, and politically. If Judaism is to survive and flourish, it cannot afford to alienate half of its members with outdated sexist language and conceptualizations.

The question arises, then: Is there any reason, in the face of such potent challenges, to insist on the continued pervasiveness of masculine God imagery? In fact, there is good reason for both women and men to refrain from embracing the new feminized liturgies. God-language is loaded (to borrow Marx's famous phrase about commodities) with "metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" such that seemingly innocent revisions change the religious substance of Judaism in unexpected and undesired ways.

One may readily concede that all God-language is in some sense figurative, that human language and understanding are unable to grasp the Ultimate. However, it does not follow that all figurative language is therefore equal in approximating the mystery of the divine. Though we never penetrate to the inner reality of God, we do encounter Him in certain relationships that *are* humanly describable, however imperfectly. To address God as Father or Lord or King does not identify the sex or describe the essential being of God so much as it defines certain relationships between Him and us. While the God we pray to is beyond male or female, He has chosen to disclose Himself in distinctly masculine ways that are structured into the meanings of the Torah and the prayerbook, and cannot therefore simply be altered at will.

For God's divine parenthood, neither mother nor father is an entirely satisfactory metaphor. Children have a genetic link to their natural mothers and fathers, whereas God's parenthood involves no genetic connection and no role for sex or procreation. Nevertheless, parenthood is a necessary metaphor for God's relation to humankind: it expresses the sense of personal care and solicitude that the words Creator and Maker fail to capture. Because generic parenthood is a meaningless concept—we have no sense or experience of a generic parent—we are stuck with the alternatives of mother and father.

There can be little doubt that, for Judaism, divine parenthood is better symbolized by fatherhood than motherhood, or at least that fatherhood is far less problematic than motherhood. In Genesis, God—like a father—generates *outside* of Himself. In the creation myth of feminine deities, however, everything emerges from the womb of the Mother God, conveying a sense that the world is an emanation or extension of the divine, and therefore divinized, as in pantheism. But at the very center of Jewish monotheism is the denial of a divinized nature: Nature is good, because God has made it so, but nature is not divine, and human beings are not made of godstuff.

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The moral and theological implications of the Mother God and "birth metaphor" have been cogently described by Rabbi Paula Reimers in her essay "Feminism, Judaism, and God the Mother" (*Conservative Judaism*, Fall 1993). If "the universe and its processes are 'birthed' by the deity," Rabbi Reimers argues, then nature and its cycles are "held to be an expression of the divine will." In such a cosmology, good and evil lose all meaning, everything being good in its proper time. Suffering and death no less than flourishing and life are to be regarded as "necessary stations on the great wheel of existence." In a "birthed" universe, moreover, "human beings are not qualitatively different from anything else that exists. They share in the divine essence, as children of the goddess, but only to the same extent that everything else does. Human life objectively is no more or less significant than the life of animals or plants. . . . Human free will is dissolved in the face of the determinism of nature." Human beings need follow no moral standard other than to accept and submit "to the divine rhythm of existence, of which they are a part."

Rabbi Reimers contrasts the "inherent pantheism of goddess religion, rooted in the birth metaphor," with Jewish monotheism, which "is rooted in the creation metaphor of Genesis." In Judaism, nature and humanity emerge not as part of an undifferentiated birth of the universe, but through discrete acts of creation in which all things are appointed a place in the hierarchy of the world. Good and evil, right and wrong, are known not by reference to nature's processes, impulses, and vitalities, but through the words and commandments of a transcendent God. Because God is not identified with the cycles of natural recurrence but with unique revelations and mighty acts—especially the Covenant—time is given meaning by progressive development, and history is imbued with direction and purpose. Human beings are not permitted to view themselves or their impulses as divine; they are to understand themselves, rather, as creatures made "in the image and likeness of God," with a dignity and worth above the rest of nature, and with free will to act according to transcendent laws concerning good and evil.

The Father-God metaphor, then, while revealing certain limits and imperfections of human language and understanding, provides a better symbolization than motherhood of the sense of distance in the divine-human relationship and is less likely therefore to invite a pantheistic cosmology. As Rabbi Reimers explains, "Those who want to use God/She language want to affirm womanhood and the feminine aspect of the deity. They do this by emphasizing that which most clearly distinguishes the female experience from the male. A male or female deity can create through speech or through action, *but the metaphor for creation which is uniquely feminine is birth.* Once God is called female, then, the metaphor of birth and the identification of the deity with nature and its processes become inevitable." Her last point is not a matter of mere conjecture or speculation: in ancient times female deities *were* in fact seen as having given birth to the world, with nature-worship following almost invariably. Today, too, feminist theology regularly falls back upon the birth metaphor, and, not surprisingly, often lapses into a pantheistic worldview as well (often under the guise of "deep ecology").

In sum, according to Rabbi Reimers, "the composers and compilers of those [biblical and rabbinic] texts knew that the deity *could* be understood as female; many of the peoples among whom they lived worshipped goddesses" (and, she might have added, their societies were male-dominated all the same). "Our ancient teachers" used masculine language for God not so much as an expression of chauvinism as a means to prevent the "introduction of alien theological ideas into the heart of monotheistic religion."

Even beyond the creation story, the divine-human relationship is in crucial respects paternal rather than maternal or generically parental. Maternal care arises more or less naturally, and mother love tends to be unconditional. Fatherhood, by contrast, is largely a socially constructed phenomenon, and it is far more conditional and hierarchical than motherhood—demanding obedience, threatening punishment, and setting standards in return for love and approval. In families without fathers or strong male authority figures, order tends to break down, particularly among the male children, who become wild and predatory.

The God of Israel introduces Himself into history as a kind of adoptive parent, in particular as a father figure who steps in to bring order to a chaotic and violent world. At times He exhibits the gratuitous love and tender care associated with femininity and motherhood—but more often our broken, unredeemed world calls forth from Him a specifically *paternal* form of authority, implemented over and against His human children, especially His sons. While women, in their own fashion, may sin as much as men, it is the pride and willfulness and violence of men that most radically disrupts the world's peace and order. Feminist reformers may have no trouble in recognizing this fact, but they seem not to notice that breaking the arrogance and power of men requires a God who is, among other things, the Judge of Nations, the Lord of Hosts, the "King of glory . . . mighty in battle" (Psalm 24:8).

Feminist critics and modern liturgy revisers often assume that God's awesome patriarchal aspect is merely an idolatrous projection of the male image, which it can be and sometimes is. At the same time, God's lordship is the only plausible check on the predatory tendencies of wicked men and nations, from Pharaoh to Haman to Hitler. The feminist argument that traditional God-language stresses power, fear, rules, and hierarchy is essentially cor-

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rect; but it misses the point that these things are required for the good of women as well as men. It is precisely His capacity as a warrior-judge that enables Him to be a God of justice who frees the captive and releases the oppressed, who answers the cries of the poor, the widows, the fatherless. "King" and "Lord" are the most convincing symbolizations for this aspect of divine action.

Reimagings that magnify characteristically feminine traits undermine the plausibility of God's ultimate power to overcome evil. Such undermining can be seen, for instance, in the celebrated fantasy of Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig (*Reform Judaism*, Fall 1992), which depicts God as a graying, late-middle-aged woman.

> She moves more slowly now. She cannot stand erect. Her hair is thinning. Her face is lined. Her smile no longer innocent. Her voice is scratchy. Her eyes tire. Sometimes she has to strain to hear. Yet, she remembers everything. On Rosh Hashanah, the anniversary of the day on which she gave us birth, God sits down at her kitchen table, opens the Book of Memories, and begins turning the pages; and God remembers.

God kvels over the achievements of her children, but laments their waywardness. "They rarely visit me," she sighs. However, if we did visit her, "God would usher us into her kitchen, seat us at her table, pour two cups of tea." Then, after listening to us spill out our troubles for a while, "finally, she touches her finger to her lips and says, 'Sha. Be still. Shhh.'" Later on, "God holds our face in her two hands and whispers, 'Do not be afraid, . . . I gave birth to you, I carried you. I will hold you still. Grow old with me.'"

Rabbi Wenig's God wonders why her children don't visit her, but she shouldn't be surprised. Though kind and gentle, she is totally ineffectual in the things the world needs most from God. There is scarcely a hint of transcendence about her. She dispenses tea and sympathy but doesn't deliver justice with a mighty hand. She offers to hold hands and grow old together, but not to heal the sick, lift up the fallen, and resurrect the dead (or, as Reform liturgy fatuously puts it, "give life to all").

It might also be said of this God that she is as thoroughly idolatrous a projection of the modern female self as one can imagine. No Jewish man, certainly no modern or liberal Jewish man, could possibly get away with a comparable self-deification. To the extent that Jewish men have too closely identified God's characteristically masculine actions with their own sex, at least they have recognized that God means to judge them, and not, as feminist reimagers propose, simply to succor and adore and vindicate them.

Another famous feminist reimaging—by Rabbi Rebecca Alpert (*Reform Judaism*, Winter 1991)—is more vital than Rabbi Wenig's God, but no less self-deifying.

> The experience of praying with *Siddur Nashim* [a prayerbook coauthored by Naomi Janowitz and Rabbi Wenig] . . . transformed my relationship with God. For the first time, I understood what it meant to be made in God's image. To think of God as a woman like myself, to see Her as both powerful and nurturing, to see Her imaged with a woman's body, with womb, with breasts—this was an experience of ultimate signficance. Was this the relationship that men have had with God for all these millennia? How wonderful to gain access to those feelings and perceptions.

The Reform movement is probably not ready for such bold feminist reimagings in its mainstream liturgies. There has been some experimentation with alternating references to God as Father *and* Mother, and more is planned. This device, however, has certain drawbacks. It implies, perhaps even more dramatically than a lone Mother God, a pantheistic worldview (i.e., the universe as product of divine copulation), or else a sexually protean deity, a hermaphrodite, or dualistic godhead.

For now these bizarre and unseemly images are avoided by emphasizing language that is scrupulously gender-neutral; but this only causes theological distortion of a different kind. The constant repetition of "Eternal One" as a substitute for Lord (*Adonai*) not only de-genders God, it radically depersonalizes and sedates Him. The Jewish God is, in a certain sense, eternal, in that He is everlasting. But the word "eternity" is problematic in the context of biblical Hebrew; it is really a philosopher's term, implying a kind of timeless essence, unchanging and inactive, frozen in isolated splendor. Such a God is perhaps relevant to a sterile religion of abstract ethics, but It provides little aid or comfort to the sick, the oppressed, and the bereaved. The God of the Bible and traditional prayerbook is personal and active. Moreover, He is *caring*. For all the severity of His patriarchy and hierarchy, the old biblical God is more caring and approachable than the vapid, comfortless entity now being forced on Reform congregants. Their "Eternal One" represents not so much a *re*-imaging as a *de*-imaging of God.

Can it be that Jewish women really prefer this abstract deity to the venerable "Lord" of their ancestors? Has feminism driven women to such resentment against all things masculine that it is impossible for them to imagine a benevolent Father or King? It is far from obvious that the traditional God is necessarily alien or alienating to most women. There is, however, a strain of feminism that *is* hostile toward

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any notion of distinctive masculine traits or social roles, and its influence within the Reform movement has persuaded—or intimidated—the rabbis to blot out all masculine God-language and imagery from the prayerbook. The result at this stage is not a full-fledged Mother God—which, by feminist lights, is the true way to make religion more accessible to women—but a compromise deity that is inaccessible to both women and men.

This genderless God also represents a profound betrayal of the Torah narrative. We can no more make the God of the Bible into a generic parent or sovereign than we can make King Lear into a mother/queen or Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, into a father/king. Father and king are aspects of Lear that are structured into his story (as Gertrude's femininity is structured into *Hamlet*). If we can respect this integrity in works of secular literature, we should want to respect it even more faithfully in the Torah. For to change the sex of a character is no longer to have the same story.

Which brings us, finally, to the most important point of all in understanding what is at stake in the issue of God-language: namely, reverence for the Torah, for its integrity, and for its role as an *aytz chaim*—"a tree of life" (to borrow a phrase from the prayerbook). The most simple and compelling reason to reject gender-reimaging is that God, though not a man or a male, has used masculine terms in making His self-disclosure to humanity. Our words for God are controlled by the word of God.

The notion of "God's word" will of course be understood differently by Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Jews, but it must be maintained in some sense by any movement that claims to be authentically Jewish. Orthodoxy understands the Bible in relatively fixed ways, and it holds that the received Torah is a perfect transcription of that which was written by God's own finger. Liberal Judaism holds that the Bible cannot always be understood according to the tradition's fixed or literal readings, and that, moreover, it is a document touched in many respects by the limitations and frailties of human nature. But this ability to criticize, while creative up to a point, must have some limits. Even liberal Judaism must maintain that the Torah is still substantially a work of transcendent truth, the inspired word of God. Otherwise the Torah becomes merely a record of all the influences that have conditioned Judaism, and it is no longer an *aytz chaim*. And if it is not a tree of life, why cling to it?

The movement to revise the liturgy along feminist lines—which stresses above all else the Torah as the ideological rationalization of an oppressive patriarchy—is not an expression of liberal Judaism but of radical deconstruction. The Fatherhood, Kingship, and Lordship of God are central and pervasive elements of Jewish tradition. The masculine character of much of God's revelation is not only structured into the story of the Torah, it is repeatedly and unambiguously affirmed. Even in the handful of biblical passages (so eagerly seized on by feminists) where the God-imagery is maternal, the verb forms remain masculine. God's predominantly masculine character may be textured so as to account for the feminine—which is also contained in the divine—but it cannot be repealed. To allow such a radical move is to concede that there is no limit on the relativizing and deconstructing of Jewish texts and teaching. It is to grant, in effect, a license for the repeal of *any* Torah precept at all—the oneness of God, the Ten Commandments . . . anything. Feminist-inspired liturgy is not the extension but rather the extinction of liberal Judaism. It does not continue the tradition of reforming an old religion so much as set the stage for the creation of a new one.

Many people who support the new gender-sensitive liturgies no doubt believe themselves to be continuing a tradition of critical reflection and religious reform going back to the great rabbinic sages. In fact, though, the current liturgy revision betrays not only traditional rabbinic method but also modern liberal—and especially feminist—emphasis on "process." Classic rabbinic decisions were reached after extensive debates, in which all sides of an issue were given full expression and review. The current Reform rabbinate simply decided to repeal the God-language of several millennia with nothing more in mind than applying a rather wooden understanding of the principle of sexual equality. Having received a mandate from the CCAR's Executive Board, the Liturgy Committee undertook extensive discussions on how to implement the changes, but never deliberated on the wisdom or rightness of such change.

In short, there was no rabbinic debate, no invitation of opposing views, no dialectical give and take, no formal statement or explanation from the Liturgy Committee to the Reform laity, or even to the Reform rabbinate at large. Some form of consultation with the laity and rabbinate is planned for several years down the road, when the next generation of highly feminized liturgies are composed. But by then there will be very little opportunity to make changes; feminine God-language will be a fait accompli.

The Reform conceit, of course, is that liberal Judaism is the most authentic expression of Torah living because, like our father Jacob, we liberals do not slavishly accept tradition but instead wrestle with things human and divine. This view may have had a measure of truth many years ago; today, however, the wrestling match increasingly resembles the "professional" wrestling seen on television: little morality plays between caricatures of good and evil, with the result fixed in advance.

The whole process of liturgy revision may be legal-

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ly and formally in accord with the institutional requirements and mandates of the CCAR. But it lacks the openness to reason and deliberation normally associated with the word "liberal." Indeed, there is a hierarchical, top-down quality to the process that contradicts the frequently heard feminist demand for open process. And there is a certain irony in having the new liturgies advertise themselves as "sensitive" and "inclusive" when, in their content and method of introduction, they rather rudely exclude those Reform Jews who want greater stability and respect for tradition in the movement. Tradition, according to one nostrum, has a vote but not a veto in Reform decision making; now, it seems, tradition is disenfranchised while feminism has all the votes plus an absolute veto.

The introduction of feminized liturgies also reveals the Reform movement's continuing recklessness toward the principle of *Clal Yisrael*—the larger unity of the Jewish people. That sense of unity is now under heavy, almost unbearable, stress. In fairness, there is probably nothing the Reform movement can do that would soften the Orthodox rabbis' implacable hostility toward all non-Orthodox expressions of Judaism (the Conservatives actually receive most of the Orthodox scorn—Reform being beneath contempt in Orthodox eyes). Yet, if the situation cannot now be improved, the Reform movement should at least be at pains not to make things worse. Though the divisions within Judaism show no sign of healing at present, wholly unexpected possibilities may arise in the future. If Reform continues to move farther and farther from a traditional Jewish theological worldview—if it continues (in effect) to show contempt for Torah and deference to political correctness—it forecloses future possibilities of cooperation and reconciliation. It will probably divide its own house as well.

The Reform movement has made some legitimate prayerbook changes in the past, but that precedent should not be used to rationalize the latest wave of radical innovation. A movement perpetually tempted by secular fashion needs liturgical continuity as a vital link to our ancestors and as well as to *Clal Yisrael*. In his book *Understanding Jewish Prayer* (1972), the late Jakob Petuchowski, one of Reform's greatest teachers, spoke of Jewish practice as "a source of obligation—even in instances where the purely human origin of a given practice is clearly recognized and admitted, and where no claim of a direct divine revelation is being made."

> For community prayer to be *community* prayer, there will have to be certain features which represent a recognizable constant, linking one worship experience to another. . . . That is why Jewish community prayer would cease to be *Jewish* community prayer if today's worship service were to be something totally and entirely different from yesterday's worship service, or last week's, or last year's, or that of a hundred years or two thousand years ago. Similarly, the Jew who travels from Bombay to Chicago must find some elements, known to him from Bombay, in the Chicago service.

Gender-sensitive prayerbooks may still retain "some elements" in common with traditional Jewish liturgy—but not enough. Their adoption by the Reform movement will lend credence to the frequent charge that Reform is not "real Judaism."

One does not want to be apocalytic at this stage of the game. The editors of the new *Gates of Repentance* do appear to have hedged their bets somewhat by holding off on the most radical feminist revisions. If the new book sells poorly, maybe that will provide the Reform rabbinate with a much needed reality check. On the other hand, if the book sells well, then the Liturgy Committee will follow through on its plan to push the envelope further, to introduce more explicit Mother-God imagery along the lines proposed by Rabbis Wenig and Alpert.

If we can get through this slightly mad period without embracing the new feminine God, perhaps we will be able to give more serious attention to women's legitimate grievances with the tradition. Women *are* different from men in the way they think and feel and understand—a point on which feminism, modern psychology, and traditional religion now seem to agree. Jewish prayer and ritual *should* address those different faculties and tendencies more than it has in the past. This purpose is not well served, however, by the current liturgical trend, which seeks to eradicate ancient truths and images, thus enshrining female resentment and male guilt and abdication. Women and men, both, have to find ways of dealing with this strange God of the Bible and prayerbook. Though we approach God with our many differences (not least the difference between men and women), we have in common the need for joy and consolation and forgiveness through prayer. In order to find these things, however, we must know that when we open our *siddur*, we are praying not to an idol of our own imagining but to the God of the Torah—that our prayer might be a tree of life to us. FT

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The Legal Logic of Euthanasia

Michael M. Uhlmann

Critics of *Roe v. Wade* have long contended that the principles used to justify abortion would soon or late be used to justify other forms of medical killing such as voluntary and, eventually, involuntary euthanasia. Slippery slope arguments are often overdone, but the fact remains that virtually every argument for taking a human life in utero can be applied to a human life ex utero, including yours and mine. Is the person "unwanted"? Medically compromised? Unwilling or unable to lead a "meaningful" life? A heavy economic burden? A hindrance to another's health or happiness? Abortion advocates, of course, dismiss the analogy as so much tendentious rabble-rousing, definitely not the sort of thing serious people should take seriously. A woman's "right to choose" bears no relation to euthanasia, and only a fool or a demagogue would argue otherwise.

What that suggests about the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, I do not know, but its March 6 opinion in *Compassion in Dying v. State of Washington* turned precisely on the point that abortion and assisted suicide share a common rationale. That rationale will be found, the court said, in the liberty guarantee of the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment ("No State shall . . . deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law"). Citing abundant Supreme Court precedent, the court pointed out that liberty is an evolving concept whose content cannot be limited by historical understanding, customary usage, or, for that matter, the words of the Constitution itself. Although the specific content of one's "liberty" at any given time may be difficult to assess, we know at least this much: choices central to personal autonomy are also central to liberty under the Fourteenth Amendment. A right of autonomy broad enough to cover a woman's right to kill her offspring, declares the Ninth Circuit, is broad enough to cover (at the very least) a terminally ill person's right to determine the time and manner of death. And thus it is that the American Proposition, which began with the declaration that all men are endowed by their Creator with an unalienable right to life, now means that they are also endowed (by whom it is not clear) with the right to die.

Two weeks after the Ninth Circuit's decision, what had been done with abandon in San Francisco was done more carefully—and perhaps more seductively—in New York City. There, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals handed down its decision in *Quill v. Vacco*, a case brought by three doctors against New York State's ban on assisted suicide. The court struck down the law as applied to terminally ill patients, but refused to follow the Ninth Circuit's reliance upon the Due Process clause. Instead, Judge Roger Miner ruled that the prohibition violated the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause ("No State shall . . . deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws"). Precisely because it is less abstract and high-flown than the Ninth Circuit's embrace of autonomy, the implications of the Second Circuit's opinion may seem less radical. The "softer" language of equal protection, however, cannot mask the fact that precious little room is left for states to assert their traditional interest in protecting human life. In either circuit, the most vulnerable of patients are now at risk.

The Ninth Circuit's case grew out of a complaint filed by four doctors and three terminally ill patients against a Washington State statute making it a crime to knowingly cause or aid an attempted suicide. A federal district court, Judge Barbara Rothstein presiding, noted a long line of Supreme Court cases protecting "personal decisions relating to marriage, procreation, contraception, family relation-

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ships, child rearing, and education." She was particularly impressed by the Court's reasoning in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey,* the 1992 case that sustained the result in *Roe v. Wade* while refabricating the entire constitutional argument on which it had rested. *Casey* cashiered Harry Blackmun's right-to-privacy rationale, which had hovered in the constitutional air for nearly two decades without a satisfactory textual landing spot. Henceforth, the right to abort was to be understood as a liberty interest under the Due Process Clause, which included (so the plurality opinion of the Supreme Court said) "the right to define one's own concept of existence and to make the most basic decisions about bodily integrity."

As a tour de force of semantic gymnastics, *Casey* has few equals in the annals of modern jurisprudence; it is, next to *Roe* itself, perhaps the starkest reminder of the extent to which our Constitution has become, at the hands of the Court, a thing of almost infinite plasticity. Indeed, it was precisely the open-ended and mushy quality of *Casey*'s language that Judge Rothstein found so comforting when she analogized the right to die to the right to abort. She cited as "highly instructive and almost prescriptive" a passage from the *Casey* decision:

> These matters, including the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, choices central to personal dignity and autonomy, are central to the liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life. Beliefs about these matters could not define the attributes of personhood were they formed under compulsion of the State.

Critics call this the "Mystery Passage." But Judge Rothstein thought it ideally suited to her purposes, and who could blame her? If indeed choices "central to personal dignity and autonomy" are what lie at the heart of the liberty protected by due process of law, how can it be said that a terminally ill person's decision to end his or her life is any less "intimate and personal" than the decision to have an abortion? Judge Rothstein, believing she was following the implications of High Court logic, became the first federal judge to find the right to die in the Constitution.

Not all of her colleagues agreed. On the first of two appeals to the Ninth Circuit, Judge Rothstein's opinion ran into a three-judge panel headed by the formidable John Noonan, a prolific author and scholar who has spent a lifetime studying common, canon, and natural law. Judge Noonan completely demolished the ruling. Whatever the Court may have intended by its *Casey* language, he said, one simply cannot excise it from context and apply it willy-nilly to facts that were not even remotely at issue in the case. Judge Rothstein conveniently ignored the fact that virtually all states forbade assisted suicide, either by express statute or well-settled common law precedent—which fact the Supreme Court noted without reservation in the one case it has heard dealing, albeit peripherally, with a so-called "right to die." Rothstein further failed to distinguish between suicide and refusing treatment, a distinction long recognized in medical practice, justified by an extensive and sophisticated literature, and endorsed by every important medical society in America. She radically underestimated the potential risk that licensed killing would pose to the poor, the elderly, and the handicapped, for whom the Fourteenth Amendment ought to be particularly solicitous. In short, Judge Rothstein's invention of a constitutional right to die was dangerous as a matter of policy and unfounded as a matter of law. "Unless the federal judiciary is to be a floating constitutional convention," Noonan added, "a federal court should not invent a constitutional right unknown in the past and antithetical to the defense of human life that has been a chief responsibility of our constitutional government."

There was more to Noonan's opinion, but you get the idea. Unfortunately, the tale did not end there. Those who are enamored of floating constitutional conventions are also the Energizer Bunnies of constitutional litigation. After regrouping, the plaintiffs filed an *en banc* appeal (a motion to have the case reheard by a larger group of judges from the same court). Their motion was granted and the case reargued before eleven judges (not including the first three), who voted eight to three to reverse Noonan and reinstate Rothstein's ruling. This time the pen was wielded by Judge Stephen Reinhardt, a sharp-tongued liberal activist only too happy to discover new rights in the penumbras, emanations, and hitherto undiscovered corners of the Constitution.

In his 109-page dissertation, Judge Reinhardt seeks to do for assisted suicide what Harry Blackmun tried (but failed) to do for abortion: fix a place for it in the Constitution, but in such a way as to obscure its radical implications. To the legally uninitiated, Reinhardt's conclusion will appear to be the inexorable fulfillment of a legal process that began decades, if not centuries, ago and flows ever so naturally and gradually out of recent Supreme Court precedent. It is a clever piece of work, designed both to give the newly minted right a plausible historical pedigree and to demonstrate its similarity and proximity to already recognized constitutional guarantees. Reinhardt clearly wishes to convey the impression that he is advancing the law only a tiny millimeter beyond where it had rested yesterday. He also wants to box the Supreme Court (where this case will almost certainly end up) with the logic of its own precedent.

Reinhardt's opinion may seduce those who are

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unwilling to pay close attention. He begins by noting the agonizing nature of the decision before him and the necessity of prudent caution. No radicals here, just some compassionate judges trying to do their sworn duty as they wrestle with their consciences and empathize with the suffering of others. There are no easy answers to such a complicated problem, he says. Clearly, a balance will have to be struck between individual rights and the interest of the state in protecting life. In pondering just where and how to strike that balance, Reinhardt says he is marvelously struck by "the compelling similarities" between this case and the abortion cases: both involve matters of life and death; both arouse similar moral and religious passions; in both, the strength of the state's interest may vary with the circumstance (age of the fetus in one, mental and physical condition of the patient in the other); and both raise fundamental questions about an individual's right of choice. There is one other similarity, he claims: as with abortion before legalization, assisted suicide is widely although secretly practiced.

The message is, if they are going to do it anyway, what possible purpose, other than the further misery of suffering patients, will be served by our continuing to forbid it? (If that sounds familiar, it's because the same argument was made twenty-five years ago in the early stages of the battle over legalized abortion.)

Having analogized assisted suicide to abortion (and thereby segued into a body of law that can be ever so flexibly adopted to his purposes), Judge Reinhardt undertakes an historical exegesis of opinions about the ethics and legality of suicide. About the best that can be said of his effort is that it would be laughable were the subject not so grave. As with Harry Blackmun's bowdlerized history of abortion laws in *Roe v. Wade*, Judge Reinhardt's abridged intellectual history seeks to show that there never was any real consensus on the subject and that much opposition to suicide is based on foolishness or hypocrisy. Legal prohibitions against assisted suicide have no genuine intellectual foundation; they are but the arbitrary moral sentiments of prior eras that make no binding claim upon us. We have no choice but to make our own rules for our own time.

With the stage thus set, Reinhardt returns to the jurisprudence of the abortion cases and concludes that denying a terminally ill patient the right to assisted suicide may work an even greater injustice than "forcing a woman to carry a pregnancy to term." And just in case you miss the point, he then recounts the gruesome details attending the death of an AIDS patient. The example stirs our compassion, as it should, but hardly settles the moral or legal question of assisted suicide in the way Reinhardt obviously thinks it does.

He fashions the final brick in his constitutional edifice by turning to the Supreme Court's opinion in *Cruzan v. Director*, a 1990 case brought by parents who wished to remove the life-sustaining feeding tube from their daughter, a patient in a persistent vegetative state. The Missouri Supreme Court denied permission because there was no "clear and convincing, inherently reliable evidence" that the patient would have wished such a fate for herself. On appeal, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the Missouri judgment but drew up far short of recognizing a right of individual patient autonomy. The most that can be said is that the Court's decision presumed for the sake of discussion a competent patient's right to decline food and water, but did so without examining the implications of such a right or its constitutional status.

Consider now what Judge Reinhardt does to *Cruzan*: (1) he cites it as if the Supreme Court had already ruled that there was a constitutional guarantee to refuse life-terminating treatment; (2) he notes that the Court expressed no objection per se to the removal of Nancy Cruzan's feeding tube; (3) he thus concludes that the High Court has implicitly recognized a due process right to bring about one's own death. That's the kind of reasoning that used to get you into trouble in legal method courses during the first year of law school for failing to distinguish between the actual holding of a case and the obiter dicta of the judges. If *Cruzan* had in fact held what Reinhardt says it held, he would not have had to write a 109-page opinion to justify his own ruling.

At every turn, Reinhardt gives the appearance of being led to his conclusion by the logic of governing precedent, but upon closer examination his reasoning is little more than ex post facto rationalization of a conclusion already arrived at. Thus, he provides us with a generic history of recent constitutional jurisprudence as it relates to liberty interests under the Fourteenth Amendment, but emphasizes only those features that tend to make the Constitution a servant of autonomous individualism. He serves up a Procrustean history of suicide and the laws against it, but only to suggest the absence of persuasive argument. He craftily recasts the one case decided by the Supreme Court that is even arguably on point. And of course he wraps himself in the logic and rhetoric of the abortion cases, especially *Casey*, because they make of the Constitution an open-ended invitation to enact a postmodernist rights agenda.

Judge Reinhardt does one more thing: he dismisses as improvident, antiquated, or unwarranted all of the traditional arguments asserted by medical professionals, courts, and legislatures against assisted suicide. He is particularly dismissive of arguments making use of the slippery slope, even as he unwittingly makes them credible. Throughout his opinion, Reinhardt is at pains to note that the right he is carving into constitutional stone is carefully circumscribed. Specifically, he says (sometimes) that the right will be limited to mentally competent, terminally ill adults seeking to determine the time and

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manner of their death. The particular examples he cites reinforce the same impression. Then a startling passage occurs:

> Our conclusion is strongly influenced by, *but not limited to*, the plight of mentally competent, terminally ill adults. We are influenced as well by the plight of others, *such as those whose existence is reduced to a vegetative state or a permanent and irreversible state of unconsciousness.* (Emphasis added.)

That's the kind of language that could get a person killed. Precisely. Those two sentences, which may end up being the most important in the opinion, send a chill up the spine. All the talk about the limited and completely voluntary nature of the right now appear as so much dissembling. Clearly the compassion of the courts is going to reach far and wide under the new dispensation, even unto those who cannot speak for themselves because they are "in a vegetative state or a permanent and irreversible state of unconsciousness."

As amended by the Plight Passage, *Casey* and *Cruzan* taken together now have the power to erase the line between voluntary and involuntary death. You will want to choose your doctors carefully, particularly with respect to their attitudes toward suicide and the use of the medical profession in hastening death. Doctors are not inherently less virtuous than the rest of us, but they are conspicuously more powerful. No one knows for sure what the medical world will be like once the legal shackles against assisted suicide are removed, but we can guess. The example of the Netherlands is not reassuring. About twenty years ago, the Dutch "reformed" their laws against assisted suicide, and the latest data from Holland now confirm what was once only a dark suspicion: thousands of patients a year are now being killed without their consent by doctors.

You may even want to choose your relatives with care. Much common and statutory law has been erected over the centuries on the possibility that some of your family may love you less than they love your possessions. Once Reinhardt's Rule gets set in law, you will have to take very special care about who will be attending to the details of your hospital stay.

Close students of the Supreme Court will tell you that they could see this coming: *Compassion in Dying* is only the first of many cases based on claims of autonomous individualism that the Court invited with its loose and grandiose *Casey* language. It is also the logical culmination of a process that began some decades ago when the Court untethered itself from the text of the Constitution and began to sit like an omniscient council of elders uniquely empowered to intuit and act upon the aspirations of the people.

Central to this Court-led revolution is the idea that the Constitution is in a state of more or less perpetual evolution, whence it follows that judges need not be bound by the precise words of the document, or by prior precedent, or by settled historical meaning. Once this predicate of a Plastic Constitution has been conceded, it is child's play for Reinhardt and his colleagues to reach the conclusion they do. To them, it is simply irrelevant that no federal judge (prior to Rothstein) had ever before found a right to die in the Due Process Clause, just as it is irrelevant that every state in the union, save one, forbids assisted suicide. What appears to be supremely relevant is that the *Casey* language incorporates the concept of autonomous individualism and places it at the center of the liberty interests said to be guaranteed by the Constitution.

Though the Second Circuit did not follow the Ninth Circuit's metaphysical flight into autonomous individualism, its own decision, based on the Equal Protection clause, and apparently safer, may in fact be more dangerous. Generally speaking, the Equal Protection clause requires that similarly situated people must be treated alike. If members of the affected class are treated differently, the state must provide and defend a rational basis for the distinction.

In the case at hand, Judge Miner and his colleagues determined that the relevant class was "all competent persons who are in the final stages of fatal illness and wish to hasten their deaths." Under New York law, patients may legally refuse treatment and authorize the withdrawal of life-support systems, including nutrition, even in those instances where such steps would undoubtedly hasten death. To ban assisted suicide, however, means that some members of the class, i.e., those who wish to hasten their deaths with the help of their physicians, are being treated differently. Because he could not find that the state had demonstrated a legitimate state purpose in making such a distinction, Judge Miner ruled that an unconstitutional discrimination had taken place. In short, New York's distinction between passive and active measures was a distinction without a difference.

It is worth noting that Judge Miner's inability to parse that distinction was not shared by the New York State Task Force on Life and the Law, a twenty-four member commission appointed by Governor Cuomo in 1985 to advise on questions of biomedical ethics. In 1994, the Task Force recommended unanimously *against* the legalization of assisted suicide and said why in an exceptionally thoughtful two hundred-page report. Few states have ever provided a more cogent explanation for any public policy, and none has ever furnished a more coherent defense of the ban against assisted suicide. If the Task Force Report couldn't pass muster with the Second Circuit, it is virtually impossible to think of a rationale that would.

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Be that as it may, Judge Miner's reasoning may be more attractive to the Supreme Court than Judge Reinhardt's aggressive candor, and that is exactly what makes it more dangerous. There is precious little to prevent an expansion of Judge Miner's logic. Given the class interests as he defined them, and given his dismissal of the Task Force Report, what "rational basis" might the state have for restricting the right of assistance to doctors? And what is the "rational basis" for limiting the class to those who are "terminally ill" or to mentally competent adults? It is only a matter of time before non-doctors, non-terminally ill patients, and guardians of incompetent individuals will be arguing that state restrictions violate *their* equal protection rights. And there is little if anything in the Second Circuit's rationale that can stop such a progression.

Perhaps anticipating just such a possibility, Judge Guido Calabresi joined in the court's conclusion while departing from its reasoning. In a lengthy concurrence, he invited New York to enact new laws against assisted suicide. He also implied that to analyze the issue as if it were solely one of class discrimination was a subterfuge that begged important underlying questions. It is a slim reed that Calabresi extends, but he is at least open to the possibility that the state might be able to demonstrate—in a way he thought it had not adequately done—a sufficient rationale for prohibiting doctors from killing.

What will the Supreme Court do with all this? There are both political and legal reasons why it may not want to address this issue at this time, and both cases could be sent back for further adjudication. On the other hand, when the two most important federal circuits in the country have taken on an issue of this gravity, the Court may find itself duty-bound to provide definitive constitutional guidance. In the event, the justices are going to find themselves in a bit of a pickle. Judge Miner's cautious, essentially procedural approach may appear to offer a "safe" way out because it denies that patients have a substantive right to die while permitting them to exercise such a right in fact. On the other hand, if the Justices embrace the substantive approach of Reinhardt and Company, they could put themselves in the middle of a passionate political and moral controversy every bit the equal to the one they generated with *Roe v. Wade*. No matter which way the Court goes, it will risk opening another door to the bottomless pit of constitutional litigation based on claims of individual autonomy, whether it is called by that name or not. In short, unless the Court is prepared to think about this issue with greater care than was evinced by the Ninth and Second Circuits—and there is little in its opinions of late to suggest that it has the moral imagination to do so—the question will be not how far we slide down the slippery slope of legally sanctioned killing, but how fast. FT

What Is Essential

Dead trees know, being
wind-taught and carved
by time. No longer desperate
with foliage, their sap
clotted, roots unclenching,
they point flayed trunks,
unburdened of all
save one or two branches,
like Chinese characters
brushed upon the rice paper sky
or spastic crosses.
It costs them everything.

Eric Potter

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Books In Review

Faith and History

THE JESUS QUEST: THE THIRD SEARCH FOR THE JEW OF NAZARETH. By BEN WITHERINGTON III. *InterVarsity. 250 pp. $19.99.*

THE REAL JESUS: THE MISGUIDED QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE TRUTH OF THE TRADITIONAL GOSPELS. By LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON. *Harper San Francisco. 192 pp. $22.*

***Reviewed by* Richard B. Hays**

AS THE "historical Jesus" debate heats up and more participants enter the fray, the general reader may understandably feel bewildered by the claims and counterclaims being bandied about. Ben Witherington's book *The Jesus Quest* provides a program to clarify the issues and identify the players.

It is generally agreed that the outburst of studies on Jesus and his historical setting since about 1980 may be characterized as "the third quest" for the historical Jesus. The first quest encompassed the various nineteenth-century efforts to write "lives" of Jesus as a great religious personality: Albert Schweitzer's devastating 1906 book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* administered the critical coup de grâce to such efforts. Subsequently, the form-critical methods that dominated gospel studies during the first half of the twentieth century shifted attention away from the Jesus of history and onto the early communities that shaped and transmitted the traditions behind the canonical Gospels.

During the 1950s and 1960s, there was a brief resurgence of interest in the problem, described by James M. Robinson as *A New Quest for the Historical Jesus.* This movement, emerging from the theological legacy of Rudolf Bultmann, sought to identify the "understanding of existence" that came to expression in Jesus' teaching. Though the "New Quest" produced one major synthetic study (Günter Bornkamm's *Jesus of Nazareth*) that served as a text for a generation of students, its representation of Jesus as an existentialist theologian was historically implausible—tending to ignore the concrete historical setting of Jesus' activity and, regrettably, to play Jesus off against the Judaism of his own time.

By the end of the 1960s the new quest had petered out. However, in light of new archaeological finds, fundamental scholarly reassessments of first-century Judaism, and the development of new approaches to the social history of the first century, we have seen in the past fifteen years a proliferation of new attempts to "recover" Jesus as a figure of the historical past. Such attempts are wildly divergent in method and results, but they may be loosely grouped together under the rubric of "the third quest." Witherington—Professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary and himself the author of two books on the historical Jesus (*The Christology of Jesus* [1990] and *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* [1994])—believes that these studies have produced some important results, and his aim is to survey critically the major contributions to the discussion.

AFTER A USEFUL opening chapter detailing the results of recent research on the social, political, and religious environment of Galilee in the first century, Witherington summarizes the work of numerous scholars in seven chapters organized according to various controlling images of Jesus that have emerged from this research: "Jesus the Talking Head" (The Jesus Seminar), "Jesus the Itinerant Cynic Philosopher" (John Dominic Crossan), "Jesus, Man of the Spirit" (Marcus Borg and Geza Vermes), "Jesus the Eschatological Prophet" (E. P. Sanders), "Jesus the Prophet of Social Change" (Gerd Theissen and Richard A. Horsley), "Jesus the Sage: The Wisdom of God" (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Witherington himself), and "Jesus: Marginal Jew or Jewish Messiah?" (John Meier and others).

Witherington's account of these studies is generally irenic, pointing out the evidence on which the various reconstructions are based and noting their valid insights. At the same time, however, his survey has a definite critical edge. Witherington's own stance is conservative in the sense that he believes that the canonical Gospels preserve reliable memories of what Jesus did and said; indeed, he believes that we can recover from these texts the self-interpretation of the historical man. Thus, Witherington does not hesitate to offer criticisms of positions with which he disagrees. (Indeed, he has the rhetorically disconcerting habit of citing his own opinion—or even his subjective reaction—as the final court of appeal in disputed matters, e.g., "Frankly, I find Sanders' discussion of miracles, like Crossan's, rather frustrating.")

Readers who do not share Witherington's confidence in the evidential value of the gospel narratives will sometimes find his critiques circular or beside the point; occasionally, as in his response to Marcus Borg, one finds Witherington rebutting historical arguments with theological assertions. Nonetheless, many of his critiques are well-informed and on target, and his outline of the various positions provides a useful overview of the debate. This is certainly the best available account of the diverse reconstructions of Jesus promulgated during the "third quest."

WITHERINGTON'S own proposal—that Jesus of Nazareth understood himself as the embodiment of the Wisdom of God—has not attracted widespread assent among New Testament scholars. Witherington argues that this supposition best integrates the data available to us in the gospel traditions. A more persuasive hypothesis, however, is that the traces of wisdom Christology in the Gospels represent one facet of the

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Christian community's interpretation of the significance of Jesus after the resurrection; it is a telling fact that the occasional representations of Christ as divine Wisdom in the Pauline epistles never appeal to traditions of Jesus' own teaching to support this remarkable claim. There is no doubt that Jesus as a teacher drew upon Wisdom motifs and traditions, but it is a very long step indeed to make the further claim that Jesus understood himself to *be* Wisdom incarnate. Sanders' portrayal of Jesus as a Jewish eschatological prophet has more historical plausibility than Witherington's hypothesis.

IF WITHERINGTON AIMS at providing an evenhanded sketch of the historical Jesus debate, Luke Johnson's book, as its title suggests, is unabashedly polemical. Johnson, the Woodruff Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Emory University, is convinced that much of the recent literature about Jesus is pure hokum. It is, on the most charitable reading, poor scholarship; at worst, it is cynical manipulation of the media and the public. The two opening chapters of the book set forth an exposé of what Johnson calls "the Jesus business." Much of this is hilarious reading, as Johnson skewers the silly and pretentious declarations of the Jesus Seminar and of authors such as Barbara Thiering, John Shelby Spong, and A. N. Wilson. (Witherington rightly judges that such books are not worthy of mention in his survey.) Johnson also trains his guns on some of the more academic participants in this enterprise: Borg, Crossan, and Burton Mack. All of this, however, merely sets the stage for the substantive argument of Johnson's book.

In his third chapter, "Cultural Confusion and Collusion," Johnson contends that the foolishness chronicled in the first two chapters is symptomatic of a cultural malaise that has corrupted our understanding of the category of "history" and created chaos in church and academy alike. Chapter four sets forth an account of the character and limitations of historical knowledge and offers a brief but masterful survey of the way in which appeals to "history" have operated in New Testament scholarship over the past two hundred years.

The fifth chapter of Johnson's book then offers a constructive sketch of the available historical evidence about Jesus. This sketch is noteworthy for its careful use of evidence from the New Testament epistles, for its contention that all the available evidence, including extracanonical material, points towards a consistent narrative pattern focused on Jesus' death, and for its sophisticated argument that the resurrection, though "real," cannot be considered an historical event. Throughout the early chapters, the reader is offered a rare gift: the distillation of a master teacher's extensive reflections on these issues. It is an intellectually powerful argument, concisely and compellingly articulated. Anyone who wants to understand the big picture of the role of biblical scholarship in church and society should read and ponder these chapters.

THE CENTRAL THESIS of Johnson's work, however, comes clearly into focus only in the final chapter: "the real Jesus" is not a Jesus reconstructed by historians but the living Lord who is experienced in the worship and activity of the Church. Johnson argues that the New Testament writings consistently bear witness that the identity of Jesus is definitively expressed in his obedience "even unto death on a cross" for the sake of the salvation of the world. Consequently, "the real Jesus" is "also the one who through the Spirit replicates in the lives of believers faithful obedience to God and loving service to others."

All of this is gracefully and persuasively argued, but precisely with regard to this final chapter certain questions about Johnson's position must be raised, and certain major points of conflict with Witherington's work noted. Is the question of the Jesus of history actually as irrel-

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evant to Christian faith as Johnson seems to suggest, and can we place as much reliance on our own experience of the Risen Christ as his argument requires?

Many of the New Testament texts themselves suggest that referential claims about historical events are integral to the biblical kerygma (e.g., Luke 1:1-4, 1 Corinthians 15:1-19). Indeed, the doctrine of the Incarnation requires Christians to affirm that Jesus was an historical man, whose life is open to historical inquiry. Furthermore, New Testament eschatology requires us to retain some reservation about the fullness or adequacy of any "experience" of the Risen Christ: we hope for what we do not yet see. Johnson's rapturous account of the powerful presence of Christ in the Church surely requires some critical controls. (He is acutely conscious of the limitations of historical knowledge but surprisingly oblivious to the limitations of experiential knowledge.) One such control is a careful and reverent examination of the evidence concerning the Jesus of history. That is why Witherington says, "Journeying toward Jesus involves more than just having a deeper relationship with the living Christ of faith, the exalted Lord in heaven. It means being committed to historical inquiry, to studying the life of Jesus in its first-century setting."

THERE IS THE nub of the issue. Johnson tends to place history and religious truth in separate compartments and to insist that historical inquiry is only marginally relevant for the witness of the Church. Witherington, on the other hand, thinks that the truth of the gospel may be at stake in historical questions. The difference is not only theological in character but also epistemological: it turns on different notions of what is meant by "history." Johnson is far more careful and explicit in his treatment of such issues than Witherington, but his position seems to reinforce the disastrous post-Kantian split between faith and history.

The gospel is a proclamation that certain events *happened* among flesh-and-blood people in history and these events have somehow wrought a fundamental transformation in our relationship to God. That is why the canonical Gospels take the form they do: they are not timeless teachings, not mystical revelations from heaven, not celebrations of the author's own personal relationship with Jesus, but history-like narratives. Thus, while Witherington's confidence in our ability to "read" the history behind the narratives may be excessive, his theological intuition is to be affirmed. There is something at stake in what we can discover about the Jesus of history.

Amidst the glut of trendy mass-marketed Jesus books, these two works by Witherington and Johnson stand out as worthy of attention. Both represent solid historical scholarship done from theologically serious perspectives. Witherington offers a sober report on recent research, whereas Johnson engages the reader in a more wide-ranging reflection about the relation between history, tradition, and faith. The juxtaposition of these two works poses stimulating questions for anyone who wants to ponder more deeply the theological significance of the quest for the historical Jesus.

Onward Christian Soldiers

GOD'S CHINESE SON: THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM OF HONG XIUQUAN. By JONATHAN D. SPENCE. *Norton. 400 pp. $27.50.*

***Reviewed by* Paul J. Griffiths**

CHINA in the first half of the nineteenth century faced unusually complex problems. The ruling Qing (Manchu) dynasty was weak and internally divided. Trade contacts with the West were increasing, but the Qing government was unsure how to deal with them. The first Opium War, concluded in 1842, showed that military resistance would not succeed. Should Western trade be restricted to the coastal cities? Or should it be allowed access to all Chinese markets? And then there was the problem of Christianity. By the 1840s, Protestant missionaries (mostly Baptist, but also Anglican) were numerous and active, publishing tracts and Chinese versions of the Bible on a large scale, and distributing them freely everywhere it was legal to do so (and in many places where it was not).

These difficulties—faced by all Asian governments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—were given special force in China by a messianic Christian revolutionary movement that, between 1851 and 1864, threatened the internal security of the country, caused millions of deaths, and was defeated only with help from the same Western powers whose missionary efforts made it possible in the first place.

This movement is usually called the Taiping ("Great Peace") Rebellion by Western scholars, after the new dynasty-name that its leader proclaimed in 1851. In 1837, Hong Xiuquan (then called Hong Houxiu), a half-educated, lower-middle-class man with ambitions to join the Qing bureaucracy, had a dream-vision following hard upon his failure in the Confucian examinations he needed to pass in order to become a bureaucrat. He could make no sense of the vision at the time, but several years later, in 1843, he read a Christian tract produced by the Baptists that made sense of it for him: he had seen God the Father and God's son, Jesus, and had been anointed as Jesus' younger brother, "God's Chinese Son."

By 1850, thinking himself destined to found a new dynasty and to make China a new Christian kingdom, he and his followers began open rebellion against the Qing. By 1853, they had taken Nanjing, the largest city in Central China, and declared it the new capital. By that time, they had a military force of several hundreds of thousands, and had consistently proved superior to government forces in battle. They made an attempt to take the Qing capital,

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Peking, but failed, mostly due to Western support of the Manchus.

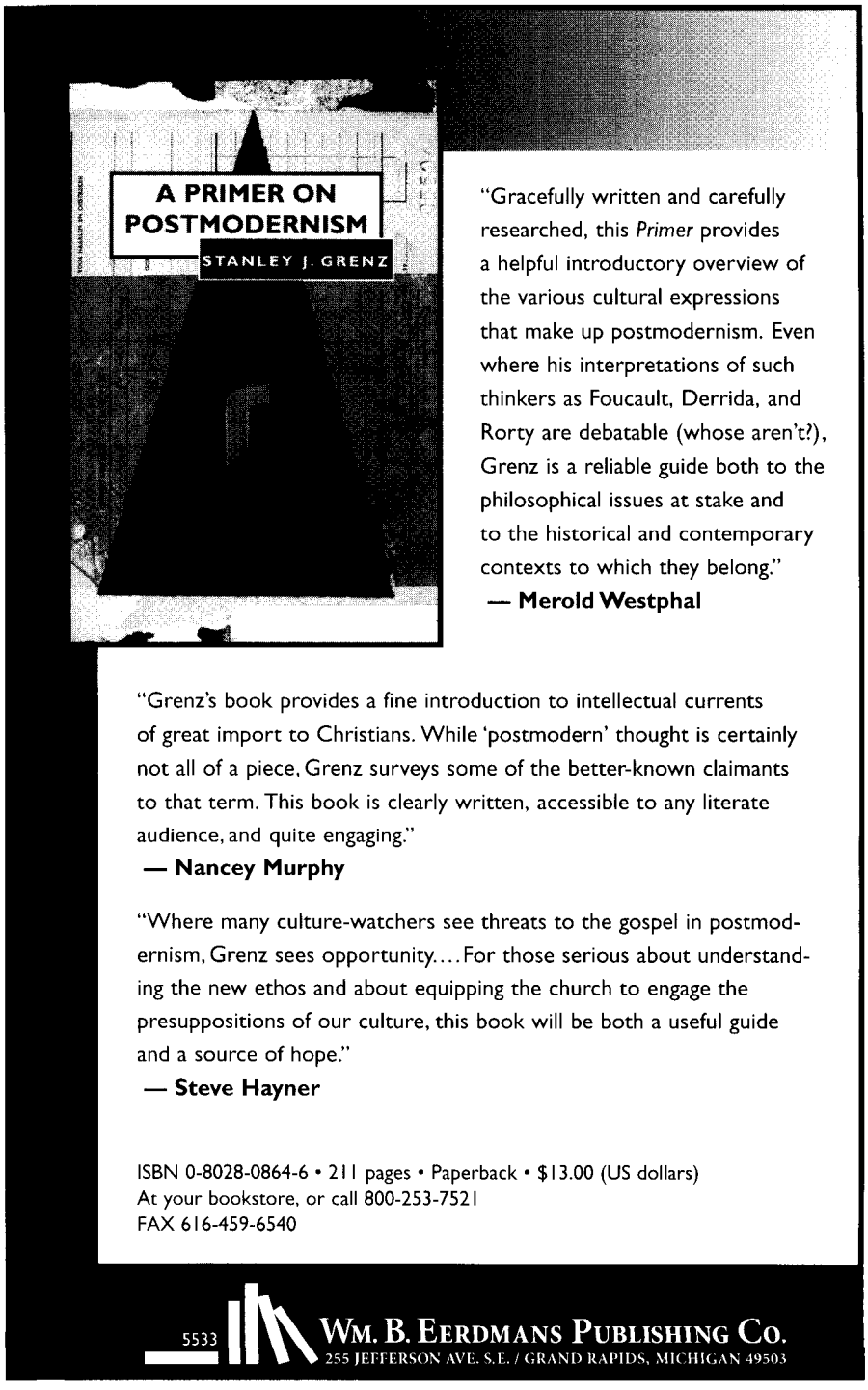
In the late 1850s and early 1860s the Taiping movement began to splinter, and in 1864 Nanjing fell to the Qing, Hong Xiuquan dying of unknown causes shortly before the city fell. By 1865 nothing remained of the Taiping Dynasty. It had lasted only a little more than thirteen years, but its legacy included millions of deaths and the irreversible weakening of the Qing dynasty; it also showed the way, militarily and to some extent ideologically, to the Chinese Communists half a century later.

JONATHAN SPENCE is an historian of China with a special interest in China's relations with the West since the sixteenth century. He is, unusually these days, also a man who knows how to tell a historical story in a way that is precise and careful while still being evocative and exciting. His earlier works, perhaps most especially *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (1984), a biographical study of a Jesuit missionary in China, show this virtue. But it is evident here to a still greater degree: this is a book likely to keep you up later at night than is healthy.

The story Spence tells is not a new one. It has been written about by scholars, Western and Chinese, almost since the events occurred. Scholars in the People's Republic of China have devoted attention to it largely because they think of the Taipings as proto-Communists. And Westerners with interests in messianism, fundamentalism, and the history of China have written much about it. But new documentary evidence was discovered in the 1980s: written records of the heavenly visions of God the Father and of Jesus (the "Elder Brother") accorded to Hong Xiuquan and other leading Taipings in the late 1840s and mid-1850s. And Spence's book is the first in English to make extensive use of these sources.

The book is important even for FIRST THINGS readers who have no special interest in Chinese history. It provides a detailed and well-documented analysis of what is probably the most effective Christian revolutionary movement there has ever been. Contemplation of the details of this story raises deep questions in missiology: If tracts handed out by Baptist missionaries in China contributed to the Taiping Rebellion, what does this suggest about how to propagate the gospel? At the very least it may mean that unrestricted distribution of the Bible without an institutional context and a tradition is deeply problematic.

The difficulties that the official representatives of the Western powers had in deciding whether the Taipings were Christians, and, if they were, whether this meant that they should be accorded better treatment than the official Qing dynasty,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show that these were difficult questions at the time. Spence records some hilariously solemn debates among the British as to the theological significance of Hong Xiuquan's views. Sir George Bonham, the British plenipotentiary, judged that although the Taipings were solidly grounded in the Bible, they had nonetheless "superadded thereto a tissue of superstition and nonsense." Not many ambassadors these days would be as confident of their theological judgments as Bonham; and he almost certainly ought not to have been.

Hong Xiuquan himself appears to have been fascinated and troubled by the differences between his own construal of Christianity and those offered by both Catholic Christians in Nanjing (of whom there were about two hundred in 1851) and by the Baptist missionaries, with whom he had extensive discussions in the 1850s. He was not convinced by these discussions to alter his views significantly, but he was prompted to make a still more detailed study of the Bible than he had done to that time. Spence offers a picture of Hong between 1860-62 holed up in his palace in Nanjing, devoting many hours a day to biblical study and annotation. Hong was not above emending the text, rewriting it in light of his own assured prophetic knowledge of God's nature and will. By Catholic Christian standards, at least, Hong's Christology was Arian and his approach to the biblical text quasi-Marcionite.

THE TAIPING story reveals how easily Christianity can be used in the service of a radically revolutionary movement. Spence shows that all the usual elements associated with such movements—language reform (the proposal of a new vocabulary and the purification of an old one), social reform (drastic reconstrual of the proper relations between the sexes, redistribution of property, alteration in habits of dress and coiffure), and religious reform (complete and violent rejection of whatever orthodoxy the revolutionary movement replaces)—were present among the Taipings. But all were given an explicitly Christian justification by the Taipings, as they have also been by some Anabaptist movements.

Study of the details of the Taiping appropriation of Christianity as a justification for revolutionary reform should become a standard part of curricula in Church History. The compressed and well-documented nature of the Taiping movement, as well as its situation of relative isolation from other construals of Christianity, means that a great deal can be learned from it, more in many important ways than from study of radical reform movements in contexts that are already Christian.

Hong Xiuquan's message, like that of St. Paul (and perhaps like that of Jesus himself), was directed at and seems to have appealed largely to nonelites. Confucian bureaucrats were not the converts; agricultural laborers and village schoolteachers were. And, as the community grew and developed in theological sophistication and institutional complexity, the means used to control disagreement and to legislate norms of conduct and belief were broadly charismatic: Hong's chief lieutenants received visions and auditions from God the Father, or from Jesus, Hong's elder brother. The New Testament parallels are once again obvious, and not accidental. The Taiping community did not last long enough to develop the institutional structures that came to order the Christian Church by the second century, but it can still provide a beautiful miniature case study of embryonic church formation.

Finally, there is a question here of peculiar poignancy, one that troubled the Western powers at the time and that ought trouble Christians now. Were the Taipings Christian? They baptized; they prayed in the name of Jesus; they regarded the Bible as the word of God; they believed in God as creator of all that is, as the only proper recipient of love, worship, and praise. They were not, of course, orthodox by Catholic Christian standards, but that is not quite the same thing. Considering seriously the question of whether the Taipings were Christian provides a splendid focus for the broader theological question of just what makes someone, or some group, Christian. Spence's book could provide a very effective pedagogical focus for discussion of this question.

It is difficult to criticize *God's Chinese Son.* Sinologists may have their own bones to pick, but my only cavil is that for a theologian or a historian of Christianity Spence doesn't give enough detail about Hong's interpretations of the Bible, or his views about worship. I would especially have liked to know more about the liturgical practice of the Taipings, since this is one of the areas that is most difficult to construct from the ground up, with the Bible as your main tool. Spence explains the Taipings' use of baptism, and makes occasional mention of public worship, but his hints do no more than tantalize.

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But in the end I have almost nothing but praise for Spence's work. The book reads beautifully as a historical narrative. It provides a moving account of a failed attempt to understand and appropriate Christianity, one that evokes sympathy in the reader for the protagonists without minimizing the massive and horrifying violence that went with the attempt. And it avoids the reductionism so tempting to historians: Spence recognizes and gives due and proper weight to the social and economic causes of Taiping behavior, but he also understands the genuine religious and moral fervor that informed what they did.

Homer for Today

THE HUSBANDS: AN ACCOUNT OF BOOKS 3 AND 4 OF HOMER'S ILIAD. By CHRISTOPHER LOGUE. *Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 56 pp. $19.*

Reviewed by **Laurance Wieder**

THE HUSBANDS is the latest installment of Christopher Logue's "account" of Homer's *Iliad*. With its companion volumes, the earlier *Kings* and *War Music*, it proves once again that poetry is the fit medium for truth. It's also great fun.

Even unfinished, Logue's Homeric enterprise is already one of the enduring poems in our language. The late-twentieth-century epic is built atop all our inherited versions of Homer—not excavated, like some linguistic equivalent of Schliemann's Troy, but built upon: a new-made *Iliad* in English verse. The new Homer has the freedom and vigor of an extraordinarily gifted and beautiful child of old, moneyed family. Logue deploys Homer's vast historical and linguistic inheritance to create an *Iliad* that, perhaps for the first time, is not held hostage by a yearning for the lost world of ancient Greek.

As this version deftly reminds us, the Trojan War was a war between East and West, between tribes (the Balkan Greeks) and empire (the Trojan Medes), between raw impulse and high civilization. Events in *The Husbands* turn around the duel between Menelaos and Paris, Helen's "husbands" and the injured parties in the war.

Here's Paris:

> Napoleon's Murat had 50 hats
> And 50 plumes each 50 inches high
> And 50 uniforms and many more
> Than 50 pots of facial mayonnaise
> Appropriate to a man with tender skin;
> He also had 10,000 cavalry,
> Split-second timing, and contempt for death.
> So Providence—had he been born
> Later and lowlier—might well have cast Prince Paris.
> The centuries have not lied:
> Observe the clotted blossoms of his hair,
> Frost white, frost bright—and beautifully cut,
> Queen Aphrodite's favourite Ilian.

Here's Menelaos charging with his spear:

> In a fast slouch, the Trojan lord,
> With a belligerent snarl, the Greek,
> Come on to it.
> Both men stand tall. Both men look large
> And though the Ilians were proud of him,
> Paris, his mirror bronze, his hair,
> Beautiful as he was, they detested him.
> But heroes are not frightened by appearances.
> Under his breath Lord Menelaos says:
> "I hate that man. I am going to kill that man.
> I want to mark his face. I want to shout into his face:
> *You are dead. You are no longer in this world.*"

What of the motive, Helen? Aphrodite tells her as she bathes:

> "You wear a crown of hearts.
> Your duty is
> To stir and charm the wonder of the world.
> To raise the cry: Beauty is so unfair!"
> Leaves. Tiles. The sky. "And so it is.
> Free. And unfair. And strong.
> A godlike thing."
> The water's net across the water's floor.

In Logue's version, the erotic suffices as a cause for war, and the conflicting intentions of human and gods are represented as something more compelling than a classroom rubric. Even the deus ex machina

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LAURANCE WIEDER *is a poet and writer. His most recent book is* Duke: The Poems as Told to Laurance Wieder *(Wiseacre Books).*

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sleight-of-hand that spirits Paris from the field before Menelaos can finish him off is handled like the dazzling stage effect it is, rather than a verbal formula.

Except for George Chapman's Homer (a great Elizabethan poem) and Alexander Pope's *Iliad* (a work of high polish and manners), most versions of Homer in English are shackled by ideas about the Greek. Verse *Iliad*s in English typically set out to relate the story, or to render word-for-word, or to recreate some aspect of Greek word order, rhythm, or measure. This requires a willing suspension of disbelief in our own language; knowledge and judgment and nuance, everything that makes the tongue a living spirit, must give way for a labored impossibility. The reader must believe that the three-thousand-year-old past is present, that Homer writes in English, and that his dialect knows of nothing that has happened in the intervening millennia. What this leads to can be found in almost any Hollywood film on a classical theme: think of all those Hercules movies; think of *Clash of the Titans*.

Poetry vibrates between two extremes. At one pole, the poem is a poem because of what it knows. At the other, the poem is poetry because of how it sounds. The knowledge and the music, inseparable in the original, become visible choices in the translation. As Matthew Arnold reminds us in his famous lectures "On Translating Homer," ideas about the language of the original poem are a downright impediment to making an English version that is poetry. Swift and direct, Homer has both knowledge and music. Poetry's material is the word, and its whole formal and conventional apparatus exists only to preserve and transmit a living voice. Ideas alone do not make poetry, just as remarks, however earnest, are not literature.

Rather than pretend to know how Homer struck his contemporaries, Christopher Logue takes Homer as a foundation, a given. Wherever it finally stops, Logue's work will look complete, because at least in the bold outline everything is already known and he, a master of metonymy, can build whatever he wants on the plains of Troy.

In loose blank verse akin to Milton's in *Paradise Regained*, Logue marshals all the imaginative resources available to an educated, sentient person at the end of the twentieth century. His narrator doesn't pretend to be a bronze-age blind bard. He knows better than to test his popular audience with catalogues and battles crowded with the genealogies and particularized deaths of heroes whose only purpose is to fall. Logue's Homer has more sense than to weight the flight of his song down with repeated epithets that might have helped a singer of tales to keep the thread and to improvise, but which only clog and spoil writing. His visualizations have the sweep and scale of wide-screen movies. Homer's heroes act and speak and are alive and believable without apology or special permit. Their motives, and the gods they pray to, are credible and moving.

Living and writing in the late twentieth century has its burdens as well as its privileges. The telescoped time of Logue's simile—as the opposing armies square off—fuses the melancholy of history with the sadness of nature:

> Think of the noise that fills the air
> When autumn takes the Dnepr by the arm
> And skein on skein of honking geese fly south
> To give the stateless rains a miss:
> So Hector's moon-horned, shouting dukes
> Burst from the tunnels, down the slope,
> And shout, shout, shout, smashed shouted shout
> Backwards and forth across the sky;
> While pace on pace the Greeks came down the counterslope
> With blank, unyielding imperturbability.

Or here, as the Greeks and Trojans under truce settle down to watch the duel between Menelaos and Paris:

> Now dark, now bright, now watch—
> As aircrews watch tsunamis send
> Ripples across the Iwo Jima Deep,
> Or, as a schoolgirl makes her velveteen
> Go dark, go bright—
> The armies as they strip, and lay their bronze
> And let their horses cool their hooves
> Along the opposing slopes.

Homer is the vehicle not only for the story of Troy, but also for much of what is known about Greek mythology, prehistory, geography, religion, and the arts. Logue doesn't try to bring all this baggage aboard his bark; he brings to his poem some knowledge Homer didn't have. To abjure the last 2,500 years would be to lobotomize his enterprise. Why have a tool that will do a job, and not use it? One might compose music in the late twentieth century for Renaissance period instruments, but it would always be, like theme park castles, a replicated rather than authentic air. *Kings*, *The Husbands*, and *War Music* (Books 16-19) make an authentic epic, for us today.

If David's psalms give individuals language for emotions and obligations and joys and predicaments predicated upon the Fall of Man and the Law, then Homer's poem is of the other eternity. There, gods are just like men who live forever, and can do what they please. Nobody knows what they have in mind. The godlike heroes do what they must, and die. Greeks and Trojans pray convincingly to gods who do or do not listen, and who themselves divide things into two: not good and evil, life and death, but them and us. Unlike the psalms, however, the *Iliad* takes no sides. Terror and pity course through both Greeks and Trojans; for Homer as well as for Logue, what survives is knowledge and music.

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Neoconservatives and Neoscholastics

BEING RIGHT: CONSERVATIVE CATHOLICS IN AMERICA. Edited by MARY JO WEAVER and R. SCOTT APPLEBY. *Indiana University Press. 416 pp. $39.95 cloth, $18.95 paper.*

***Reviewed by* Paul Baumann**

CAN IT BE TRUE, as the historian James Hitchcock darkly suggests, that the conservative Catholic William F. Buckley "has sometimes been regarded as a less than fully committed ally on issues involving sexuality"? Is sexual correctness on the right really this unforgiving? And you thought it was hard for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

This collection of essays covers the ideological terrain from neoconservative George Weigel, who celebrates the modern church's eagerness to engage the world and other religious traditions, to neoscholastics orphaned by the Second Vatican Council's embrace of other theologies, to the most embittered, even loopy, "traditionalists" who think the Council's *aggiornamento* a betrayal and an apostasy.

Editors Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby and their collaborators immerse us in a roiling sea of contested assertion and testimony. Many conservatives, for instance, attribute an erosion of discipline in the Church to a theologian-led rejection of *Humanae Vitae*. These Catholics, one suspects, confuse the poor reception of a difficult and not always persuasive teaching for a lack of faith, and the laity's eagerness for reasoned engagement with a failure of obedience. Though the teaching of the magisterium is owed an obsequium of the intellect and will, how central the ban on artificial contraception is to the truths of faith remains a subtle question not likely to be resolved by papal authority alone.

Most conservative or traditionalist Catholics are animated by the potent idea that something has gone drastically wrong with the postconciliar Church. Where once there was a fortress and a rock impervious to the depredations of the modern world, now—to change the metaphor—there is an often rudderless ship, rife with mutineers and foundering on compromise and accommodation. As Joseph Komonchak argues in an astute essay, whether one emphasizes the Council's essential continuity with tradition or praises its departure from established practice, there is no denying its revolutionary impact. Where for at least two hundred years the Church had set itself against a world increasingly characterized by democracy, liberalism, and religious pluralism, the Council abruptly turned to face and even embrace ideas once judged anathema.

A FEW AMUSING sidelights help give the lay of the land. First, the endearingly wayward Pierre Martin Ngo-Dhin-Thuc, former Archbishop of Hue in Vietnam. According to essayist William Dinges, Thuc's dismay over reform culminated in his consecration of three so-called traditionalist bishops in 1975. Rome promptly excommunicated him. The Vatican and Thuc reconciled shortly thereafter, but the promiscuous laying on of hands soon proved too great a temptation, and in 1979 Thuc illicitly ordained two Mexican priests. In the meantime, the Thuc bishops were busy multiplying themselves, ordaining fugitive priests and even bishops. Apostolic succession and the doctrine of *ex opere operato* are two of Catholicism's most charming transcendental guarantees, but they can bring canonical and metaphysical headaches.

Then there was the haughty and schismatic Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, the late French prelate who judged the Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom a capitulation to the principles of the French Revolution. Vatican II's acceptance of religious liberty "gives error rights," Lefebvre complained with some justification. "The Modernists have achieved what they wanted." As a consequence, the "adulterous union" of the Church and the "Revolution" produced "bastard" sacraments and priests. Lefebvrists and other traditionalists hold in contempt ecumenism and episcopal collegiality, and especially abhor the abandonment of the Latin Mass.

A robust Marian revival is also part of the conservative insurgency,

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and the popularity of Marian conferences, usually featuring apocalyptic exhortation from a handful of adepts, is chronicled by Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz. On the academic front, coeditor Weaver conducts a Cook's tour of the handful of Catholic colleges recently founded by conservatives who think that more venerable institutions such as Notre Dame and Georgetown have lost any distinctive Catholic identity or mission.

BEING RIGHT is a descriptive exercise. Weaver and Appleby eventually hope to complete a map of the entire contemporary American Church. For this volume, the editors invited a number of conservative Catholics to explain their own goals. James A. Sullivan, Vice President of Catholics United for the Faith (known by the admonitory acronym CUF), explains the enthusiasm for policing liturgies and dissent. Helen Hull Hitchcock's history of Women for Faith and Family (WFF), an organization dedicated to resisting feminism and affirming the "natural and essential distinction between the sexes," is especially interesting in light of the Vatican's recent determinations against the ordination of women. WFF was formed in 1984 in an effort to convince the American bishops, who were then futilely struggling to write a pastoral letter on women, that the Church's traditional sexual anthropology is just fine, thank you. Altar girls, an innovation much bemoaned by WFF but recently approved by John Paul II, would appear to leave these loyalists between a rock and the hard place of evolving liturgical practice.

James Hitchcock, from the same busy household, describes his metamorphosis from a "*Commonweal* Catholic" who welcomed reform to a vehement opponent of the ethos of the postconciliar Church. In an effort to resist the "unhindered path to secularization" embarked on by Catholic universities and academics, Hitchcock helped to found the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars in 1977. Like WFF, which endorses "all" Catholic teaching, the fellowship says it embraces "the entire faith of the Catholic Church."

All and *entire* are favorite modifiers for many conservatives. Their appropriation of the dense, complex, and even contradictory world of Catholicism brooks little qualification. At first glance such bold declarations seem admirably capacious, but there is a tendentiousness and a questionable sense of historical tidiness at work as well. As Cardinal Newman reminds us, "We shall find ourselves unable to fix an historical point at which the growth of doctrine ceased, and the rule of faith was once for all settled." That fact about the "living" tradition of Christian belief and doctrine should militate against any predisposition to champion the univocal exercise of authority, to see change as simple corruption, or dispute as disloyalty. As the Editor-in-Chief of FIRST THINGS has put it, "The first obligation is not to think like the Pope, but to think with the Pope."

Besides, as Appleby and other contributors (Allan Figueroa Deck, S.J., most interestingly on "premodern" Hispanic Catholicism) demonstrate, the Church has rarely been either neat or placid. Can there be any serious doubt that Catholic teaching, if ultimately faithful to the principles of tradition, changes and develops? Indeed, for Newman "one source of corruption in religion is the refusal to follow the course of doctrine as it moves on, and an obstinacy in the notions of the past." Few more dramatic examples of doctrinal development exist than the reconciliation effected between Catholicism and democracy by Vatican II's formal acceptance of religious freedom. Appleby's essay, "The Triumph of Americanism: Common Ground for U.S. Catholics in the Twentieth Century," deftly analyzes the historical ironies and strange theological bedfellows that have resulted.

In that context, the dexterity of George Weigel's assessment of the intellectual challenges presented by the ongoing conversation between Catholicism and the American "experiment in ordered liberty" deserves special attention. Weigel knows it is imperative that Catholicism refurbish the transcendental categories now under such suspicion in the larger culture. "The issue," he writes, "is to develop a theological grammar and vocabulary that can confront secularism and satisfy the (often latent) religious hungers of the contemporary world, without requiring our contemporaries to become medievals . . . and without dissolving Christian truth claims into expressions of a wholly subjective 'religious experience.' . . . Rather than holding beliefs as givens (the distinctive characteristic of traditionalism), we recognize that our beliefs are choices. Yet we insist that those beliefs, even as choices, disclose the truth of things."

NEOCONSERVATIVES sometimes cast the current Bishop of Rome as more an oracle than the first among equals, but Weigel indulges in little such overt politicking. Theologically, he gets the balance between tradition and development right. As Appleby notes, neoconservative and liberal Catholics share a telling set of assumptions about the compatibility of American freedoms and Catholicism. Weigel knows that Catholicism has always assimilated the best of what the world offered while it went about trying to transform that world. Conservatives are right to worry about the moral agnosticism that increasingly colors American experience, and right to insist that tradition and authority, highly suspect categories for Americans, are indispensable to revealed religion. What is too often slighted by many in *Being Right* is a historically informed appreciation of theological conflict, individual conscience, and a receptive engagement with the world.

To be sure, progressive Catholics tend to reverse these emphases, naively championing the sovereignty of individual judgment or "experience" while disparaging the apparatus of authority as little more than an impediment to the imminent arrival of the Kingdom. But as Newman wrote, religious truth, being a living thing,

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emerges only through a "never-dying duel," a "warfare of ideas" in which authority and private judgment work mysteriously in tandem.

To demand the unconditional surrender of either side in this contest betrays a lack of faith in Christ's promises to his Church. Yes, Catholicism's ability to defend its hierarchical structure and protect its sacramental life—to insist that salvation is fundamentally a mediated reality—is sorely tested in the American context. But whatever the immediate pressure of those threats, the only way forward is the traditional way forward—for a patient authority to insist on its prerogatives while nevertheless assimilating the truth offered by those who question those prerogatives. A glimpse of a more abiding truth is something only a catholic church, and none of her partisans alone, can make manifest.

BRIEFLY NOTED

THE BIBLE IN MODERN CULTURE: THEOLOGY AND HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD FROM SPINOZA TO KASEMANN. By ROY S. HARRISVILLE and WALTER SUNDBERG. *Eerdmans. 282 pp. $20 paper.*

The aim of this book is to provide "a confessionally critical history of modern biblical criticism," that is, "an analysis that is historically aware of the influence of cultural contexts on the formulation of ideas while, at the same time, seeking to be responsible to the church and its dogmatic tradition." Harrisville and Sundberg identify the dogmatic tradition of the church with Augustinian theology and its "dark view of human nature," its stark opposition of nature and grace, its emphasis on election and predestination, and its trust in ecclesiastical authority. The energizing tension of the book derives from counterposing this Augustinian worldview to the Enlightenment tradition from which historical-critical study derives. Examining fairly and sympathetically an array of important thinkers (including Spinoza, J. Gresham Machen, and Rudolf Bultmann), the authors provide brief but helpful summaries of the lives and teachings of their ten main figures and offer many probing and perceptive observations about the interaction of Christian theology with modern intellectual history. The title of Harrisville and Sundberg's book can be misleading, since the role of the Bible in modern culture includes elements likely to be undervalued by those committed, like them, to "Augustinianism nuanced by Luther." Their volume is, in fact, not just exclusively Christian, but very Lutheran, very theological, very German, and very much focused on the New Testament. Another book with the same title might have dealt with the role of the Bible in the arts, with the contribution of originally secular methods of reading to the elucidation of the Bible, with the increasing relevance of the methods and substance of rabbinic midrash to biblical studies, with the positive effects of recent historical-critical study on Jewish-Christian dialogue, and with the astonishing revival of Hebrew as a vernacular over the last century. Even with its limitations, however, *The Bible in Modern Culture* is a welcome and accessible contribution to an increasingly important discussion.

— Jon D. Levenson

COMMUNION: CONTEMPORARY WRITERS REVEAL THE BIBLE IN THEIR LIVES. Edited by DAVID ROSENBERG. *Anchor. 547 pp. $30.*

The latest in a booming genre, which might be called Famous Writers Review the Bible. Earlier entries include David Rosenberg's *Congregation: Contemporary Writers Read the Jewish Bible* (1987), Aldred Corn's *Incarnation: Contemporary Writers on the New Testament* (1990), and Christina Buchmann and Celina Spiegel's *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible* (1994). Here, Rosenberg (coauthor of *The Book of J*) assembles thirty-six literati, ranging from renowned figures like John Barth and Denise Levertov to a host of relative unknowns, and asks them to produce personal memoirs of reading the Bible, using their artistic gifts to discern the human element that lies buried within a text "layered over with religion." In other words, he calls for—and receives—intensely subjective responses to the Holy Book, frequently based on childhood memories, adolescent reveries, or adult sexual politics. The writing in these essays is polished but the insights grow mundane, the tone cloying; one thirsts for some good old dry-as-dust scholarship. Despite Rosenberg's intentions, *Communion* demonstrates that classical readings of the Bible still serve us best, that self-revelation pales alongside Revelation, and that truth in the service of art is always less compelling than art in the service of truth.

— Philip Zaleski

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THE SECRET MELODY: AND MAN CREATED THE UNIVERSE. By TRINH XUAN THUAN. *Oxford University Press. 313 pp. $25.*

This popular account of modern cosmology, a best-seller in France, is better than its subtitle would suggest. Beginning with a chapter on prescientific and early scientific cosmologies, the author makes the interesting claim that "paradoxically, it was the reintroduction of religion into cosmology that was to advance the scientific element of later universes." The thirteenth-century bishop of Paris, Etienne Tempier, suggested that the universe is infinite. Nicolas of Oresme in the next century pointed out the relativity of motion and that the apparent motion of the stars could be caused by the rotation of the earth. And Nicholas of Cusa in the fifteenth century speculated that all bodies, including the earth, move through an infinite universe that has no center. The next five chapters are a readable account of modern cosmology and the relevant physics. The book takes a philosophical turn in the last few chapters. Thuan is not hostile to religion—he "wagers" that there is a God—but his theology is at a low level. He says, "Quantum uncertainty has shattered the argument for a first cause. In the quantum mechanical world of elementary particles, causal relations and determinism no longer hold." This is on a par with saying that, because the first act of Hamlet does not uniquely determine the rest of the play, there is no need to posit a playwright. After explaining that there was no time before the beginning of the universe (and giving due credit to St. Augustine, who beat modern cosmology to this insight by fifteen centuries), Thuan concludes that God cannot "cause" the universe, since causes must precede their effects in time. He backpedals by allowing that the Augustinian conception of God existing outside of time makes sense, but claims that such a God must be "impersonal" and "no longer . . . able to help us" (because, being outside of time, He could not act within time). Thuan, a professor at the University

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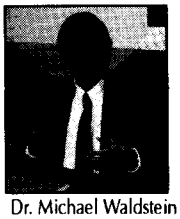

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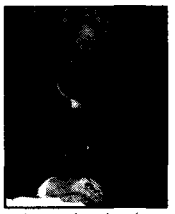

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of Virginia, is called "the French Carl Sagan." That judgment, in my view, is too harsh.

— *Stephen M. Barr*

JERUSALEM, THE ENDLESS CRUSADE: THE STRUGGLE FOR THE HOLY CITY FROM ITS FOUNDATION TO THE MODERN ERA. By ANDREW SINCLAIR. *Crown. 295 pp. $24.*

The villains in Sinclair's retelling of the Crusades (the chief subject of the book) and of the recent history of Jerusalem are religious believers—Christians, Muslims, Jews. The less people believe, the more secular things become, and the better things will be for everyone in the Middle East. Sinclair's superficial account will do little to help readers understand this city's history.

— *Robert L. Wilken*

A BYZANTINE JOURNEY. By JOHN ASH. *Random House. 336 pp. $24.50.*

John Ash ends his leisurely chronicle of travels through the territory of the Byzantine Empire with the fourteenth-century fresco of the Resurrection of Christ in the former church of Saint Savior in Chora. Unlike many popular writers on Byzantine history who seem to have eyes chiefly for Constantinople's decadent court life, Ash has an interest in the religion of the Byzantines. Though the choice of topics is shaped by his travels in the Turkish interior, the book can serve as an inviting introduction to Byzantine history and culture. It includes a list of emperors, chronology, and a well-selected bibliography.

— *RLW*

TRUE HEROISM IN A WORLD OF CELEBRITY COUNTERFEITS. By RICHARD KEYES. *NavPress. 265 pp. $18.*

Are there any heroes in an age of cynicism, when everything noble is debunked and dissected into ignoble elements? The cynical debunkers of heroism should themselves be debunked. How can they know that all heroism is sham, that courage and benevolence are but masks for selfishness? In this engaging and provocative book, Richard Keyes offers a strong spiritual antidote for our culture's loss of heroes. After clarifying the difference between the celebrity ("well known for being well known") and the hero (who is distinguished primarily by moral character), Keyes delves into the gospel accounts to reveal Jesus Christ as the paradigmatic hero of the ages. In the life of Christ, he perceives an unparalleled sense of purpose, love, forgiveness, courage, endurance, and service. Those who seek to imitate the heroic qualities of Christ, Keyes claims, will never attain his perfection. They can, however, find in Christ forgiveness, hope, and the incentive to become heroes themselves. Keyes also looks at heroic parents, and provides practical wisdom for fractured families. Parents need not be superpeople to be heroes to their children, but they must attend to the things that matter most. Savoring this book is a good step toward discerning just what those things are.

— *Douglas Groothuis*

GOD THE ALMIGHTY. By DONALD G. BLOESCH. *InterVarsity. 329 pp. $24.99.*

The third in Bloesch's projected seven-volume systematic theology, this one dealing with the doctrine of God and focusing on the attributes of power, wisdom, holiness, and love. Bloesch has read widely and synthesizes wisely, presenting a Protestant orthodoxy that is fully engaged with contemporary challenges to Christian faith. For more on Bloesch's part in the resurgence of dogmatic theology among evangelicals, see Carl Braaten's review essay "A Harvest of Evangelical Theology," (FT, May 1996).

COMING THROUGH THE FIRE: SURVIVING RACE AND PLACE IN AMERICA. By C. ERIC LINCOLN. *Duke University Press. 157 pp. $17.95.*

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By faith we perceive that the ages have been fashioned by the word of God, so that what is seen to occur does not happen for reasons that appear obvious. Hebrews 11:3, from ch 1

God gives authority to whom he will on earth, which means that he gives it to bad rulers, not just good. cf. Daniel 4:17, et.al., from ch 3

If you wonder how God can be good seeing he first created and then has long maintained our sorrow-filled world, *The Politicians* is a book to read. It is a collection of the author's writings which together set forth the biblical explanation of what God is doing with mankind, and why, and what he plans for our future.

Synopsis

Ch 1. biblical meanings of *heaven*, *earth*, *all*, *forever*, and others.
Ch 2. God launches human civilization, twice: a new translation of Genesis 1-11, with notes.
Ch 3. why God created man: historical context and goals.
Ch 4. rewards God promises those who serve him.
Ch 5. conceivable sources of human wickedness, and the significance each may have to our admiration for God.
Ch 6. why the gospel has met with less than universal acceptance.
Ch 7. a brief introduction to the Bible.
Ch 8. the quality of Jesus as a ruler.
Ch 9. the quality of God as a ruler.
Ch 10. God and Jesus merit our allegiance.

Twelve appendices, among which are:
A: a time line from Adam to Abraham.
B: a note on darwinism.
D: population estimates for Genesis.
E: a harmony of the gospels, including reconciliations of both the birth and resurrection of Jesus.
G: a new translation of Ephesians 1-3.

Tidbits

Ch 1: The Hebrew word usually translated *all* (כל) does not always mean *all without exception*. It can also mean *most*, *majority*, *plurality*, *many*, and *the few but most important ones*. Two examples where *all* does not mean *all without exception* are Gen 6:13,17 with 6:18-20 and Ex 9:6 with 9:19-21. The same is true of Greek *all* (πας); consider John 4:39 and Acts 2:5.

Ch 2: In Gen 4:5, character, not gift, may be the issue. ☐ Is it not true that if you make good happen, you will be well received? And if you do not make good happen, error lies in wait for such opportunity, and error's desire is for you, and you will decide the matter. -- Gen 4:7. ☐ At the time of Gen 4:3-16, it appears that God was personally present and acting as governor. ☐ By the time of Gen 4:26, it appears that God was (purposely) letting his political influence wane.

Ch 3: Wants of God: civilizations, organized in ways he likes, populated by people who trust him enough to obey him; to rule over these civilizations; to be liked, respected, and feared; to be worshipped (shown affection at a distance).

Ch 4: Among the future rewards God plans for some who serve him now are wealth and public office: God loves his creation, and needs good people to carry on the administration of his government, and needs those who will use the assets he puts under their control productively, safely, and in other ways that accord with his will.

Ch 5: If God was in some way inept as a creator, and this has been a source of wickedness, he is still much better than us in every good way, and we shall just have to endure God's weakness, and make the best of what he has done, and cooperate with him, for he seeks to make the world a better place.

Ch 6: What God does with man influences, and is influenced by, policy matters that encompass the whole of his realm. So then, what God might do if man were his only concern, he is not always willing to do because of other considerations.

Ch 7: God is not just creator of man the organism, but also creator of civilization. ☐ Christ is the key to discerning biblical accuracy. The plan is to outline evidence closest to the present, and work backward in time, namely from New Testament to Old Testament.

Ch 8: God cares about such abstract concepts as Ownership, and Marriage. ☐ At the very heart of civilization are *rules*, guides to behavior, restrictions on action. ☐ We all want to be happy; our happiness is bound up in the questions of what the rules of order shall be, and whether the rules are kept.

Ch 9: God loves people, and his love is not just calculation, but reaches to his emotions. Here is love from the heart. Here is love sufficient to motivate jealousy.

Ch 10: God must necessarily be a policy maker and enforcer; he must balance the inherently competing self-centeredness of both himself and every individual in his civilizations. He must be a politician.

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in race relations and is noted for his *The Black Muslims in America*, published more than twenty years ago. The present book is in some respects a memoir about being black in America, and mostly an exhortation to interracial trust and cooperation. It bears witness to one man's determination to resist the siren songs of racial separatism, regardless of the race of the singers.

ALL GOD'S PEOPLE: A THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH. By DAVID L. SMITH. *BridgePoint/Victor. 487 pp. $22.95.*

One of the most striking developments among evangelical Protestants in recent years is the theological rediscovery of the Church. Smith, a Baptist theologian, goes so far as to affirm that there is "no salvation outside the church" (although he carefully distances himself from the ways Catholics have sometimes interpreted that claim). The present work is an admirably thorough treatment of the biblical, historical, and dogmatic understanding of the Church from a Protestant perspective that does not hesitate to engage Catholic and Orthodox challenges to conventional Protestant thought. Smith welcomes initiatives such as the declaration "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" as lifting up the imperatives implicit in a discipleship that cannot separate Christ the head from his body, the Church. If the convergence between Catholics and Protestants continues in the decades ahead, it may well be that historians will look back and give generous credit to *All God's People* as one of the books that marked the way toward a greater measure of Christian unity.

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WHY YOU CAN DISAGREE AND REMAIN A FAITHFUL CATHOLIC. By PHILIP S. KAUFMAN. *Crossroad. 222 pp. $15.95 paper.*

A revised and expanded version of a theological counsel on the minimum required to stay in good standing as a Catholic, at least by the standards of one Benedictine monk at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota. The author makes a point of saying that he does not encourage people to do their own thing and does encourage them to stay in the Church, but the message that comes through is that you can do your own thing in the Church. Foreword by Fr. Richard A. McCormick, a theological expert on moral minimalism.

CRIMES OF PERCEPTION: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HERESIES AND HERETICS. By LEONARD GEORGE. *Paragon. 358 pp. $29.95.*

A Canadian psychologist with a sharp eye for the iniquities perpetrated in the name of religion offers a wildly imbalanced but not unamusing brief against all religions (most particularly, of course, the Catholic Church) except the alternative spiritualities that he seems to favor. Preaching to the anti-choir.

REDISCOVERING THE SACRED: SPIRITUALITY IN AMERICA. By PHYLLIS A. TICKLE. *Crossroad. 190 pp. $19.95.*

Ms. Tickle, the religion editor at *Publishers Weekly*, is certainly right that there is great spiritual commotion in contemporary America. However, her confidence that we are moving toward the development of an "American religion" that will incorporate parts of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as well as various New Age eruptions, is not carefully thought through. Doctrine and tradition that transcend the contemporary configuration of American culture receive short shrift. Then there is the little matter of truth, in several old-fashioned meanings of the term.

RECONSTRUCTING CATHOLICISM FOR A NEW GENERATION. By ROBERT A. LUDWIG. *Crossroad. 240 pp. $17.95 paper.*

The author directs campus ministry at DePaul University, Chicago. Feminist/liberationist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether writes, "Robert Ludwig sees a generation of young people starved for spirituality, while a conflicted institutional church offers little to inspire them." Can you imagine millions of young people being inspired by, for example, John Paul II? She continues, "Ludwig proposes a renewed vision of the Jesus experience in justice-seeking, ecologically aware sacramental communities as the reconstructed Catholicism that can live anew from its ancient roots and speak to today's spiritual hunger." Thanks for the warning.

MINISTRY AND MEANING: A RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF CATHOLIC HEALTH CARE IN THE UNITED STATES. By CHRISTOPHER J. KAUFFMAN. *Crossroad. 354 pp. $29.95.*

In the seventeenth century, Vincent de Paul directed the Daughters of Charity: "When you leave your prayers for the bedside of a patient, you are leaving God for God. Looking after the sick is praying." That, according to this splendid history of Catholic health care, is the spirit that imbued those who built an astonishing network of orders and institutions. The author recognizes that that spirit is severely attenuated in enterprises that now fret over the "Catholic identity" of institutions that frequently seem to have lost their religious way.

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THE PUBLIC SQUARE

A Continuing Survey of Religion and Public Life

Richard John Neuhaus

Marriage, Divorce, and "Pro-Family" Credibility

Among the most powerful social and political forces of our time is the "pro-family" movement. Pressed by organizations such as Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council, as well as by the emphatic teaching of the Catholic Church, millions of Americans have been caught up in the effort to restore "the traditional family." As every cause must have its antithesis, the movement has been greatly energized by radical feminist hostility to the family as an oppressive institution, and, more recently, by homosexual agitations to relativize the meaning of marriage and family by the formal recognition of same-sex unions. Driving the movement, too, is alarm over the explosion of illegitimate births in the urban underclass (now over 80 percent of births), as well as in the general population (around 30 percent of births).

With respect to family and marriage, as well as many other things, there is a tradition of efforts, some of them quite innovative, to restore the traditional. One phase of this particular tradition is carefully examined in a new book by Joel F. Harrington, *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany* (Cambridge University Press). Reviewing the study in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Joachim Whaley writes that "the difference between Protestant and Catholic marriage reformers was much less than is commonly thought. Both responded to the growing perception that the institution of marriage as defined in the twelfth century was breaking down. The medieval reforms made marriage into a sacrament, a state clearly inferior to celibacy, yet still holy, consensual, and indissoluble. This may have solved a theological problem, but it did little to regulate the institution as such. Indeed, the doctrine that consent alone validated a marriage potentially liberated the institution from both familial and communal control. By 1600, many German commentators believed that anarchy prevailed: sexual promiscuity was rife, clandestine marriages made a mockery of the whole social order, while the law on consent was abused by both the disobedient minors (to get into marriage) and unscrupulous philanderers (to get out of it)."

In Protestant mythology, the example of Martin and Katie Luther, as well as other Reformers, established the ideal of the *Pfarrhaus* (parsonage) in which clergy families provided a model of marriage that is liberated from "priestcraft" and affirms the sanctification of the secular. "Marriage reformers had no argument with the canonical tradition as such. They simply aimed to make it work in the interests of stability and good order in society as a whole. The Protestants did this by rejecting celibacy and desacramentalizing marriage. The recognition that sexual drives were natural relieved marriage of its 'unspiritual' taint. Furthermore, once it was no longer a sacrament, control over it passed from ecclesiastical to secular authority, which allowed the introduction of such measures as divorce, and ultimately presaged the complete secularization of marriage. Yet Harrington emphasizes that this should not blind us to the similarity between Protestant and Catholic reform in the sixteenth century. The Catholics retained celibacy, the sacramental character of marriage, and the principle of ecclesiastical authority over it. But the addition of numerous conditions concerning validity (the publication of bans, the presence of a priest and witnesses, registration in a parish register, etc.) betrayed the same anxiety to stem sexual immorality and correct abuses in the laws of marriage."

Only Yesterday It Was Different

The conclusion offered is that "the Reformation did not fundamentally change marriage and that the new Protestant ideal of an affectionate family had little effect on social reality. Society remained resistant to the high-minded measures of both Protestant and Catholic reformers." Well, not quite. Everything has its ups and downs, and since the

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sixteenth century there are indeed many people who have been "resistant" to the Christian construal of marriage, but it hardly seems true to say that Protestant and Catholic teaching have "had little effect on social reality." Today's champions of "the traditional family" are not indulging in nostalgic reconstruction when they contend that things were not always as they are now. In the last two centuries in Europe and America, and within the memory of any middle-aged person, both having children out of wedlock and divorce were relatively rare and subject to strong social censure. This was especially the case among the more religiously committed.

In recent years, some more candid evangelical Protestants have decried the "hypocrisy" of preachers who are silent about the evil of divorce, in many cases because they are themselves divorced. In the Lutheran denomination in which I was reared, it was only twenty-five years ago that a pastor who was divorced or even separated almost automatically demitted the ministry. There were exceptions when the pastor was clearly the "innocent" party in the breakup of the marriage. (There were then clear criteria for determining guilt and innocence.) Today among Lutherans there are pastors and even bishops who have been divorced more than once, and much the same is true of other denominations. The no-fault mentality has insidiously entrenched itself in the churches, and a profound change has taken place in a willy-nilly manner without benefit of serious theological and moral examination.

It seems almost nobody wants such an examination. Marital circumstances, whether of clergy or laity, are dealt with "pastorally" and "nonjudgmentally," which usually means that normative morality is suspended in deference to cultural accommodation and the avoidance of "giving offense." Some argue that this change is, all in all, for the good. However that may be, there is a corrosive dishonesty in winking at biblical and traditional norms that were, not so very long ago, invoked as binding. Certainly it can do nothing for the confidence or the credibility of preachers who still invoke those norms in other areas of sexual behavior such as chastity, adultery, and, not least, homosexuality.

Uneasy Catholics

There is, to put it delicately, uneasiness among Catholics as well. Critics claim that the increased number of annulments granted has made annulment tantamount to "Catholic divorce." Of course an annulment does not dissolve a valid marriage but is a declaration that such a marriage never existed (while acknowledging the legitimacy of the children born of the union). Diocesan marriage tribunals today put increased emphasis upon the "maturity" of the intention with which a couple entered upon marriage. The result is to increase the number of annulments as it is discovered that there were "impediments" to a valid marriage and, at the same time, to elevate the level of understanding that should be brought to marriage. It has been suggested that there is a certain irony in the fact that, as the understanding of sacramental marriage is elevated, it becomes easier to get out of unions that fall short of that high mark.

At the heart of the Catholic practice is the concern to keep faith with the indissolubility of marriage, a teaching grounded in both Scripture and Christian tradition. The words of Jesus would seem to be unequivocal, "What therefore God has joined together let no man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). In addition, there is a rich scriptural and sacramental understanding of marriage in analogy to Christ and the Church. St. Paul writes, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the Church" (Ephesians 5:31-32). A man can no more abandon his wife than Christ can abandon the Church. "For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church" (Ephesians 5:29). The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love between Christ and the Church. Baptism itself is a nuptial mystery, a nuptial bath, that precedes participation in the wedding feast of the Eucharist (Ephesians 5:25-26).

Of course there are many who say that the Catholic teaching, however beautiful and well grounded scripturally, is simply "unrealistic" in today's cultural circumstance. Certainly it runs counter to cultural currents, but that is nothing new. Studies such as Joel Harrington's remind us that patterns of sexuality and mating have typically been unruly. In human history, the actual living out of marriage as a lifelong union has been the exception rather than rule. In Matthew 19, Jesus says that Moses allowed divorce because of the hardness of hearts. But he teaches that he has come to restore God's original intention. This is an integral part of his being the Second Adam who sets to right what was disordered by Adam's sin. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it this way: "By coming to restore the original order of creation disturbed by sin, Christ himself gives the strength and grace to live marriage in the new dimension of the Reign of God. It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves, and taking up their crosses that spouses will be able to 'receive' the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ. This grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross, the source of all Christian life."

Small Crosses

Talk about bearing the cross does not go down easy these days, but that, too, is nothing peculiar to our times. Earlier this year I preached at an Episcopal church for the Week of Christian Unity.

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Afterwards members of the vestry hosted a dinner at a local restaurant. It turned out that most of those present were former Catholics, each having "left the church" because of a marital irregularity. "Episcopalianism is our half-way house," said one, "until the Catholic Church gets more realistic about its marriage rules." I didn't want to be argumentative, but muttered something about bearing the cross, to which another woman piped up and smilingly said, "You're probably right, but the nice thing about the Episcopal Church is that it has such a little cross." The rector, a dear friend of long standing, was not amused.

Evangelicals and other Protestants sometimes express admiration for the Catholic Church's effort to hold the line on marriage and divorce, but there is a price to be paid. Despite the Church's insistence that they are still cherished members, innumerable Catholics think they have been excommunicated because they are living in marriages not recognized by the Church. Although they are urged to attend Mass and make a "spiritual communion," being barred from full participation in the sacraments no doubt feels like excommunication to many. Then too, and despite the Church's teaching, some priests act on their own to "resolve" marital irregularities in the confessional ("the internal forum"). But it is not only maverick priests who find the official practice intolerable. Last year some German bishops of impeccable orthodoxy proposed that exceptions should be made for couples in particular circumstances, but the proposal was firmly rebuffed by the Vatican.

In this country there are canon lawyers on marriage tribunals who say privately that in the long run the Church will have to recognize divorce. As one puts it, "I understand the importance of indissolubility, and I don't know how we'll square changing that with Scripture and tradition, but the present practice is simply not sustainable. We're losing too many people." Others are even more adamant, however, in saying that the Church cannot change a practice that is based on the doctrine of Jesus, the apostles, and centuries of authoritative teaching. They add that, even were change possible, now would be the worst possible time to do it. In this view, those critics are exactly right who view the Catholic Church as the last holdout against cultural liberation from the traditional restraints surrounding marriage, family life, and sexual behavior more generally. Were the Catholic Church to change its teaching and practice, they say, the dam holding back the libidinous urgencies of a licentious culture would collapse completely. That claim is far from implausible.

In the early centuries, in the High Middle Ages, and again at the time of the Reformation, Christians were compelled to rethink and reformulate their understanding of marriage and the family. After the Reformation, it was several centuries before that understanding took firm root, but in the last thirty years much of it has been uprooted in both teaching and practice. In 1979, in his first papal visit to the United States, John Paul II raised eyebrows when he suggested that the agenda for ecumenical dialogue should include moral teaching. The reference was to practices such as abortion and euthanasia, of course, but also, by implication, to Christian morality regarding marriage and family.

Too Late?

At the end of the twentieth century, the question is whether Protestants, Orthodox, and Catholics can believably set forth a distinctively Christian understanding of marriage. Some say it is too late, that even the Catholic Church must finally go along with the de facto polygamy that is the practice of serial monogamy. One must hope they are wrong. In any event, no amount of pro-family and pro-marriage agitation can cover up the contradiction of Christian acquiescence in a culture of divorce that produces disposable spouses and turns the solemn covenant of marriage into a contract of convenience. If it is evident that Christians are not held to fulfilling the most momentous vow they will ever make to another person, young people and others may be forgiven for thinking that the churches are not entirely serious in their moral teaching about other matters, especially those related to sexuality. A twice-divorced preacher railing against homosexuality is more likely to be perceived as a bigot and hypocrite than as a champion of "traditional values." And with good reason.

FT

A PARADIGM AT TWENTY

"Long before Francis Fukuyama's book *Trust* alerted us to the importance of associational life for economic prosperity, and long before Robert D. Putnam reported fewer and fewer Americans participating in civil associations, and long before Daniel Bell, in the pages of *The Public Interest*, heralded a return to the study and appreciation of civil society, and long before 'social capital' became a buzzword, Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus authored, in 1977, a short pamphlet anticipating much of this."

I'm not inclined to argue with that judgment by Adam Wolfson, executive editor of the *Public Interest*, who is reviewing *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society* (edited by Michael Novak, AEI Press). The new book of essays updates the twenty-year sojourn of the argument that Peter and I set forth in the original tract, also titled *To*

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Empower People. The language of that essay has now become the common parlance of public policy debates—"mediating institutions," "empowerment," "new paradigm," and so forth. Enriching the vocabulary is not the same thing as changing minds, however, and changing minds is not the same thing as changing policies. Over these twenty years, four administrations, from Carter through Clinton, have claimed pieces of the argument, or at least of the vocabulary, but none has demonstrated much resolve in acting on it.

Recently the American Enterprise Institute hosted a big conference in Washington celebrating *To Empower People* and its authors, which I enjoyed immensely and Peter seemed to mind not at all. I'm of the view that you take snatches of your fifteen minutes wherever you can get them. I don't know if the argument was as prescient as Wolfson and many other policy experts claim, but who am I to argue? I do know that even people as insightful as Wolfson do not get, or are not persuaded by, key aspects of the argument. Not all mediating structures are good, he says, and there is no doubt about that. But then this: "Mediating structures must be judged by this criterion: Whatever their profession or form, do they teach the virtues? Do they teach the love of man? If such judgments are not made, we may end up with a dense network of mediating structures, a revivified society, but one that is hardly *civil*."

Yes, but the critical question is, Who does the judging? If the state makes the judgment of which institutions can benefit from vouchers, tax credits, and other measures, we end up with the governmentalizing of mediating institutions and the consequent destruction of what makes them so invaluable in the first place. At the heart of *To Empower People* is the contention that those most immediately affected by the decision (notably parents and families) are in the best position to decide which institutions will best serve their needs—in education, health care, housing, and other areas. It is a radically democratic argument that is untouched by any illusion that people will always choose wisely. Apart from choices that are clearly criminal, however, people have a right to make dumb choices.

The further presupposition is that almost everybody will make better choices for themselves and their families than the options imposed by the megastructures of the welfare state. One either believes that or one doesn't. It is not easily testable by the criteria of what is called social science. If one doesn't believe it, however, he is in conflict not merely with the argument of *To Empower People* but with the assumption of self-governance upon which the American experiment in republican democracy is constituted. Or so it seems to me.

Peter and I doubt that we will see the mediating institutions proposal implemented on a grand scale, but then, part of the proposal itself is that we should be suspicious of almost everything attempted on the grand scale. For all the talk about them, new paradigms hardly ruffle the old parameters of political business as usual. But we are hopeful about some stirrings, and rumblings, and experiments at the edges. On school choice, tenant management of government housing, community policing, and drug rehabilitation, there are promising initiatives underway all around the country. We are open to the possibility that policy makers, as well as many in the general public, are beginning to think anew about what a self-governing society might look like. Meanwhile, it is nice to have so much attention paid.

FT

FAILED PREDICTIONS

In recent months, particularly in the pages of the *New Republic*, we've witnessed a series of well-known (and not so well-known) liberals thrashing about in search of new justifications for the unlimited abortion license. Quite apart from the proof this ought to offer the Republicans that even the pro-abortion chorus recognizes which way the wind is blowing, we are still left with the question of why liberals seem suddenly to recognize the need for new justifications—especially since they got such mileage from their old ones.

"The answer," writes Candace C. Crandall in the Winter 1996 *Women's Quarterly*, "couldn't be simpler." Abortion was sold to the American public in the early 1970s with a long series of claims about its future social benefits. "Without exception," twenty years after legalized abortion, "those claims have proved false." The trouble with promoting something by making factual predictions is that eventually people find out whether you were right. And about all its major social predictions, the 1970s abortion lobby turns out to have been wrong.

"Perhaps the most powerful of the pro-choice arguments," Ms. Crandall points out, was that illegality of abortion would leave America in "the dark ages when thousands of women died because of unsafe, back-alley abortions—between five thousand and ten thousand a year was the figure usually given" in the 1970s. "In fact, it wasn't *Roe v. Wade* that made abortion safe: it was the availability of antibiotics. . . . Had pre-*Roe* abortions been so very dangerous, we would have expected a sharp drop-off in the death rate among women after *Roe*. But Centers for Disease Control show no decline in the years after *Roe*."

Other powerful claims put forward in those years were that legalized abortion would eliminate child poverty, reduce illegitimacy rates, and help to end child abuse ("Every child a wanted child," ran the

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slogan). Rarely have predictions been more spectacularly falsified—especially the prediction of reduced illegitimacy: "Only 10.7 percent of all births were to unmarried mothers in 1970. . . . It stands now at 26 percent. Two-thirds of all black children are born out of wedlock."(Some studies suggest higher figures.)

Of course, Ms. Crandall adds, "there was probably something disingenuous even at the time in abortion advocates' concern for children." Abortion supporters found a happy ally in the Zero Population Growth movement that had begun to gather steam in the earlier seventies. Paul Ehrlich and his ilk predicted imminent horrors from pollution and disease caused by overcrowding: a life expectancy down to forty-two by 1980, all ocean life dead by 1979, thousands of smog deaths in 1975, and so forth. Legalized abortion, we were assured, was our only way to ward off the "population bomb." We certainly got abortion, but any notion that it saved us from environmental disaster can only strike one as absurd, for those predicted horrors never came close to happening: "Paul Ehrlich looks pretty silly now."

The last of the seventies predictions to prove false was the claim that legalized abortion would remove the question from the legal and social realms, making abortion a matter entirely between a woman and her doctor. Leaving aside the fact that nearly twenty-five years later legalized abortion still remains our most pressing legal and social issue, the claim that the issue of abortion could be medicalized turns out to be wrong in a way that we should have been able to predict long before: the medical profession has for the most part declined to join the partnership. "Two-thirds of obstetricians and gynecologists in practice in the United States refuse to perform abortions, according to a survey released by the Kaiser Family Foundation in September 1995. The reasons given by these doctors only rarely included pressure from anti-abortion activists. Most doctors cited religious scruples or simply said they did not like doing them." The majority of abortions are done by just 2 percent of the available doctors.

Even women seem to have opted out of the notion of abortion as a medical issue. Nearly 50 percent of those having abortions last year were women who had previously had abortions, while nearly 20 percent had had more than one. Legalization has made abortion into a contraceptive backstop that is virtually the opposite of "choice." In fact, abortion turns out to be pretty much what we should have expected in 1972: a nasty but legal business in which a handful of failed doctors offer the clinical murder of babies as an expensive form of contraception. No wonder the authors in the *New Republic* and elsewhere seem so desperate to find new arguments with which to salvage the abortion license.

FT

THE PLEASURES OF REGRETFUL UNBELIEF

No major literary figure of our time is more religion-obsessed than John Updike, and that is evident also in his latest novel, *In the Beauty of the Lilies.* Writing in the *New York Review of Books,* Michael Wood of Princeton says the story is religion-driven from beginning to end. Clarence Wilmot, a Presbyterian minister, loses his faith, and two generations later his spiritual heirs end up dying in a Waco-like *Gotterdämmerung.* Woods writes: "The structure of the novel suggests that Clarence Wilmot's fall from faith has somehow caused this carnage and confusion; that the failure of belief will not have awakened modern America to reason, only delivered her to more craziness than anyone can bear to contemplate. 'The death of one god is the death of all,' Wallace Stevens wrote. On the contrary, Updike's novel suggests. The death or senescence of the institutional God is the birth of a cloud of avengers. Is there no secular hope, no brighter, more modernizing reading of Clarence's lapse? No release from religion which is not a further flight into religion? Not in this novel, or this novel's America, where 'the snake pit of history bequeaths us its mad dreams.' 'The patterns of damnation are glamorous,' Jesse Smith says. 'Lucifer was the fairest of the angels. But God scraped him off the edge of Heaven like a little piece of goat shit.' When the bad guys have all the lines, what are the good guys to do?"

The fact that John Milton, among others, has pondered such questions more imaginatively does not mean they do not deserve to be pondered again. Over the years, Updike has presented himself as someone who, like most Americans of his class, has misplaced his faith and wishes he could find it again but knows he can't. In Updike's view, the ineluctable disappearance of religion in the life of Americans has been replaced by the ersatz religions of devotion to the bitch goddess of material success, and to the excitements of a degraded popular culture (the cult of the silver screen figures large in *Lilies*). Never mind that this has, at best, a tenuous connection to the experienced reality of most Americans. Updike's sales suggest that enough of them enjoy the idea that his depiction is true of other people.

I know Updike is wrong about the disappearance of religion, and I expect he is wrong about what has replaced it in the lives of those for whom it has disappeared. For a certain sector of society, religion has been replaced by the aesthetic, by culture understood as high culture (and, increasingly, as deviant culture). People endow museums and go to concerts the way an earlier elite supported religion and went to church. There are rules also for the literary culture, in which the very gifted Updike is

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one of the very few superstars. Admission to this world requires not a denial of God but a discreet silence about Him, unless one can speak elegantly of how very much one regrets His death. This John Updike has been doing for a very long time now, and he does it better than almost anyone else around. At the upmarket end of popular culture, he provides his many readers a momentary pleasure of pretended angst about their certitudes, a brush with ever so refined and regretful unbelief. The spiritual descendants of Clarence Wilmot are to be found not at Waco but at your local Barnes & Noble, where John Updike will likely be appearing soon.

FT

BUTTS NOT TO BE REBUTTED

There are some questions that can hardly be answered without getting into deeper trouble. For instance: Have you stopped beating your wife? Or if someone says there is nothing of which you are incapable, it does not enhance one's moral credibility to issue a list of things that one would never do. Which is to say that there are butts best left unrebutted. Nonetheless, Father Richard P. McBrien, professor of theology at Notre Dame, feels he must respond to a critic's claim that those opposing papal teaching are theologians who "see no limits." McBrien writes, "Let it be said one more time: There are limits to Catholic orthodoxy. I know of no Catholic theologian who would disagree." He then sets out fifteen limit-setting theses. "For example, it is beyond the limits of Catholic orthodoxy to deny the reality of God—of the sacred, the holy, the supernatural, the transcendent." And the final thesis: "It is beyond the limits of Catholic orthodoxy to deny any basis for our hope in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting."

Fr. McBrien concludes: "It is always a mistake to assert a universal negative—as in 'see no limits'—because even one exception undermines the validity of the assertion. In this case, there are scores of exceptions." Or at least fifteen exceptions to the claim that there is nothing Fr. McBrien is incapable of denying. Notably absent from the exceptions he offers, however, are any limits peculiar to being a *Roman Catholic* theologian. To cite but a few examples, there is no mention of distinctively Catholic moral teaching, or of bishops and communion with Peter, or of the teaching authority of the Magisterium. A theologian who is an Episcopalian, Lutheran, or Baptist (at least a high church Baptist) might agree with all his stated "limits of Catholic orthodoxy." McBrien does mention the seven sacraments, but then affirms only that they have "spiritual efficacy." If that be the mark of a sacrament, a non-Catholic might gladly assert that there are not seven but seventy times seven, or more if you wish.

Of course, Fr. McBrien does not say that his list is exhaustive. Were he to go on to elaborate the "scores" of limits he says he has in mind, one may hope that Fr. McBrien would come to something distinctively Catholic, but the present list is most notable for its omissions. There is the further difficulty of who sets even these few limits. Fr. McBrien says he is speaking for himself and other theologians, and then specifies, "I mean real theologians with theological doctorates, teaching positions, and a publications record." So maybe he has addressed the question of Magisterium after all. The Magisterium, it seems, is Fr. McBrien and others whom he recognizes as belonging to the sacred college of academic theologians. One may observe that the question of obedience is greatly simplified when obedience is rendered to oneself and those of like mind.

A reader may wonder if Fr. McBrien might have been better off not to attempt to rebut the claim that he sees no limits. For the record, however, let it be said one more time: Fr. McBrien believes there are limits to Catholic orthodoxy. No fair-minded person would deny that that certainly seems to be true in his case.

FT

UNHINGED BY HARPING

Andrew Sullivan, who has just stepped down as editor of the *New Republic*, admits to "harping" on the question of gay rights, and so he has. Under his leadership, that distinguished magazine acquired a distinctly lavender hue. Mr. Sullivan is a learned man and usually writes with a certain style, which no doubt explains why he gets a more serious hearing than most advocates of the gay cause (see Elizabeth Kristol's review of his *Virtually Normal*, FT, January).

In a recent issue of TNR, he returns to his subject, once again lamenting the alleged inconsistency of the Catholic Church in countenancing the marriage of infertile couples while rejecting same-sex marriage. "The theologians' best answer to this is simply circular," writes Sullivan. "Marriage, they assert, is by definition between a man and a woman. When pressed further, they venture: well, sexual relations between two infertile heterosexuals could, by a miracle, yield a child. But, if it's a miracle you're counting on, why couldn't it happen to two gay people? Who is to put a limit on the power of God?"

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That, one regretfully notes, is the cleverness of the sophomoric. Couples who were infertile frequently do have children. Often, as it happens, after they have adopted a child. When that happens, it is not a miracle in the sense of something that reverses nature but a healing and restoration of a natural capacity. Anyone who has to have it explained that it is unnatural for homosexual copulation to produce a child is, one fears, not really interested in serious argument.

In an article occasioned by his unhappiness with Pat Buchanan, Mr. Sullivan moves from the sophomoric to the meretricious. Buchanan has made critical remarks about homosexuals and their cause, and in response Mr. Sullivan notes that the Buchanans have no children. "Either Buchanan is using contraception, in which case he is a hypocrite; or he or his wife is infertile, and he is, one assumes, engaging in non-procreative sex. Either way, I can see no good reason why his sexual life is any more sinful than mine." Mr. Sullivan was brought up to be well mannered and knows that there is something tawdry about his making a public issue of the Buchanans' marital life, but he excuses himself this way: "Indeed, I would regard anyone's inability to have children, if he wanted to, to be a sadness I should privately sympathize with and publicly say nothing about. Why, I wonder, cannot Buchanan express the same compassion and fairness for me?"

The obvious answer is that Buchanan has not asked Sullivan or anyone else to discuss in public his relationship with Mrs. Buchanan. Sullivan, on the other hand, insists that his homosexuality is a matter of great public moment, and demands a radical change in centuries of family law to accommodate same-sex "marriage." Had he not turned his sexuality into a political campaign, no doubt Pat Buchanan and almost everyone else would regard Sullivan's unhappiness as "a sadness they should privately sympathize with and publicly say nothing about." It has long seemed that Andrew Sullivan's reputation as a consequential thinker about matters sexual is somewhat inflated. With the indecency of making a political issue of an opponent's childlessness, it appears that Mr. Sullivan has become unhinged by his harping.

FT

REDOCTRINALIZING ANGLICANISM

When the dust has settled, if it does settle, we will be doing something more comprehensive on the "heresy trial" of retired Episcopal Bishop Walter C. Righter for having violated church order by ordaining a homosexual not pledged to chastity. As the story unfolds, it is worth keeping in mind several points generally overlooked in the media coverage. The bishops who signed the "presentment" that occasioned the present proceedings make clear that Bishop Righter is only the first of a number of bishops who might be similarly charged. Seventy-two bishops signed the 1994 "Koinonia Statement" initiated by Bishop John Spong of Newark and supporting the ordination of homosexuals. Quite a few of these bishops (the exact number is unclear) have themselves performed such ordinations.

Second, it is by no means evident that this first procedure was a "heresy trial." The phrase "heresy trial" is favored by the press, of course, because in the American ethos of tolerance it creates strong sympathy for the dissenter putatively oppressed by an ecclesiastical establishment. Bishop Righter's defense lawyer, however, insisted that there is no question of heresy because in fact the Episcopal Church has no authoritative teaching on these matters, and therefore Righter can only be guilty of bending the rules of procedure. From the viewpoint of many Episcopalians, the claim that the church has no authoritative teaching is the more damning indictment, vindicating their believe that the communion is doctrinally adrift.

David W. Dunlap, who has covered the story for our local newspaper of record, joined many reporters in playing it strictly as a case of inclusiveness vs. exclusiveness, of love vs. bigotry. In the media and in the Righter proceedings there is an increasingly explicit doctrinalizing, so to speak, of the position that the church has no doctrinal test other than the doctrine that there can be no doctrinal test. In some ways this is no more than an extension of the much vaunted tolerance of Anglicanism, but in the face of homosexual assertiveness the canons of tolerance have become more rigid.

Otis Charles—described by the *Times* as "the only openly gay Episcopal bishop," thereby implying that others are in the closet—says, "The new phenomenon is that we're no longer willing to remain silent and invisible. More and more individuals are saying we're going to live openly and honestly as the people we are." The wink and the nudge, the giving of the benefit of the doubt, the charitable looking the other way—none of these can be tolerated any longer. Those who aggressively come out of the closet make it necessary for everyone else to take an explicit position on their sexuality. This in-your-face strategy excludes the option of Anglicanism's tradition of studied ambiguity regarding positions in conflict.

Bishops such as William C. Wantland of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, who is a signer of the Righter presentment, worries that the Episcopal Church is

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declining because it seems not to stand for anything. It may be, however, that the opponents of his way of thinking, who seem to have the upper hand in the church leadership, are a step ahead of that complaint. They, too, want the Episcopal Church to stand for something quite definite, but quite definitely different. The Rev. David L. Norgard, who is openly gay and is chairman of the national church's Standing Commission on Evangelism, says, "I'm thoroughly convinced, and hold it as a point of faith, that in the long run people are turned off by a church that excludes."

It is noteworthy that the "point of faith" is not, as is traditionally the case, about revealed doctrine but about strategy based on a reading of culture and social dynamics. Most sociologists of religion would likely think that Norgard's is a misreading that would lead the Episcopal Church into becoming an upmarket version of the Metropolitan Community Church, an association catering to the 2 percent or less of the population that is actively homosexual. But whether the head of the Standing Commission on Evangelism is strategically right or wrong, the more interesting development is the increasingly explicit doctrine that the Episcopal Church is a non-doctrinal communion. That is not the way that Anglicanism has traditionally presented itself, either to its own communicants or in theological dialogue with other Christians.

For a relatively small communion (somewhat over two million members) the Episcopal Church is producing a remarkable number of lay and clergy initiatives to do public battle over the future of the church. This energy, whether supporting or opposing current trends, testifies to the strong allegiance many feel to Anglicanism in this country. For the progressives, the hope is to capture what has historically been an elite denomination for what they earnestly believe to be the wave of the future. For the conservatives, the somewhat more desperate hope is to preserve what they believe to be a catholic form of Christianity that is an alternative to Rome and Orthodoxy. Even as they sound the trumpet for battle, many conservatives acknowledge that theirs is a holding action, and that the 1997 General Convention may force a decision about continuing membership in the Episcopal Church.

Anglicanism prides itself on its ability to muddle through by somehow containing contradictions over which others divide. It may be, however, that that story is now coming to an end. If so, future historians may debate whether the end was a matter of the church abandoning doctrine or displacing one understanding of doctrine with another. Both Bishop Wantland and the Rev. Norgard are devoted to articles of faith. For the bishop, those articles are given by Scripture, ecumenical councils, and other authoritative references affirmed by the Anglican tradition. For the chairman of the Standing Commission on Evangelism, while claiming to honor those authoritative references, the normative articles of faith are constructed by perceived cultural directions and personal needs.

In the absence of a teaching office that can effectively decide for one or the other, these conflicting orthodoxies must do battle through the quasi-democratic procedures of church politics. As both church history and the history of nations demonstrate, combatants frequently have little control over the issue around which the definitive battle is joined. Thirty years ago, few would have predicted that the issue would be homosexuality. On the other hand, those Episcopalians may turn out to be right who say that it is in the nature of Anglicanism that no battle is definitive.

FT

Peddlers of an Unreal World

It's an argument I've been making for years, with little success: Social observers in general and religious folk in particular vastly overestimate the influence of the news and entertainment media. A Protestant friend who is a very successful writer routinely rails against our "post-Christian society." His supporting evidence is largely drawn from movies, television, and the papers. Recently a Catholic bishop told me that he was "scared to death" when a television executive told him that, given enough money and air time, the tube could make the American people think whatever its owners wanted them to think. Instead of being scared to death, he should have pointed out that this is arrant nonsense, the braggadocio that typifies overpaid egos who dominate a shrinking media market. Of course the media have a powerful and frequently malignant influence, but if they had only a small part of the influence that they (and their critics) claim, we would be living in a country that we would hardly recognize.

Were the television networks, the movie producers, and the editors of the prestige papers really in charge, there would be no pro-life movement, active euthanasia would be the uncontested law of the land, every school child would be indoctrinated in the joys of gay sex, home schooling would be prohibited, church schools would be run by state agencies, government day care for preschool children would be mandatory, churches would not be tax-exempt, and smoking anywhere would be a criminal offense. Certainly Reagan and Bush would never have been

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President, the Republican Party would be on the Department of Justice list of suspect organizations, and Ralph Reed would be in jail. That's just for starters.

Do I exaggerate? Maybe just a little. But imagine, on the basis of their record of advocacy, the America that would be created by Dan Rather, Peter Jennings, and Frank Rich of the *New York Times*. It is possible, of course, that were such an America to come into being, with all the authoritarian controls that would be required, those worthies would change sides and protest the oppression. In that case, many liberals might embrace conservatism as the "true" liberalism. No doubt the word "neoconservative" would be reinvented to describe them. But my point is that Rather, Jennings, Rich, and their ilk are not running the country. They make a difference, no doubt, but they are increasingly fighting to maintain their niches in media empires that are more and more out of touch with the American reality.

So who pushed my buttons on this subject? The other day I was speaking at Gettysburg College, a school in Pennsylvania with a vestigial Lutheran connection, and a professor took strong exception to my claim that ours is not a secular society but one that is maddeningly confused in its pervasive religiousness. All you have to do, he asserted, is to look at television, movies, and the big papers to see how thoroughly secular America is. But that's like determining what the weather is by reading weather reports rather than looking out the window, or reading sex manuals to understand sex. In the case of the media and social reality, the gap is considerably wider.

The Sunday after Gettysburg the professor's objection was on my mind as I was looking at the local publication that styles itself the world's newspaper of record. It is Palm Sunday and here is the television guide for Holy Week. Twenty-some movies and other programs are lifted up for special attention. These are among the items promoted for Holy Week: two polemics against white racism, an attack on the tobacco industry, three murder mysteries, one story about a serial murderer, a comedy about soap operas, a story on the sexual abuse of children, and a drama about vampire families in San Francisco. On Good Friday there is one movie that has what might be called a transcendent dimension—*Rosemary's Baby*, a story about the Devil's son born of woman.

You may object that it is not fair to judge all the media by the *Times*, and it is not fair to judge the *Times* by its weekly television guide. Perhaps, although it is generally acknowledged that the news media routinely take their lead from the *Times* and the entertainment and culture business is heavily dependent on its judgment. As to whether the television guide is a good guide to the *Times*, the ten pounds of newsprint that Sunday had no other reference to religion other than a business story about selling palms to churches and an article in the Sunday magazine about a Catholic who has decided to become a Jew. Well, there was one other story, a rather sad one, that might count as religious. It was about aging homosexuals who regularly get together to reminisce, dance, and talk dirty in the basement of an Episcopal church in Queens.

Why They Do It

But stay with the television guide for a moment. No doubt, had I bothered to look through the many pages of listings, I would have found some religious services and maybe an old Cecil B. DeMille biblical epic being broadcast that week, but the interesting thing is what the editors chose to feature as being worthy of attention. None of the programs was related to, and some of them were grossly antithetical to, what is represented by Holy Week. Not so incidentally, especially in New York, the same week was Passover. The Lubavitcher hasidim bought two full-page ads urging the world to get itself ready for the return of the Moshiach, the late Rebbe Schneerson. So the *Times* collected well over $300,000 in ad revenue related to the week (including a full page of paid church notices) but, being a newspaper of scrupulous integrity, did not let that influence its studied indifference to there being anything noteworthy about Holy Week and Passover.

For those who by occupation or obsession (or a mix of both) monitor such things, the *Times* is as good a window as we have into the perversities of what passes for—because, unfortunately, it is—our high culture. How to explain that television guide? This is a city in which about 75 percent of the population is Christian and somewhat over 15 percent is Jewish. The majority of New Yorkers would be in church or synagogue at least once that week. Is it possible that the editors of the guide were not aware that it was Holy Week and Passover? It seems more than possible. Stanley Rothman and others have for years been giving us the research that demonstrates an enormous "religion gap" between the American people and the media elite. And I remember the reporter who told me he wanted to do a story that dealt with the influence of John Henry Cardinal Newman, only to be turned down by three senior editors who had never heard of Newman. In trying to understand the media, do not search for other explanations when ignorance will suffice. But *Rosemary's Baby* on Good Friday? I'm sorry, I think somebody knew exactly what he was doing.

At Mass on Palm Sunday morning, I looked out from the altar at hundreds of fervent worshipers and, knowing that the same thing was happening in hundreds of other places around the city, had no doubt that this, and not what the *Times* reported, is the real world. Of course what the *Times* and its media minions present as reality has real effects.

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Among other things, it makes that evangelical writer, that Catholic bishop, and that Gettysburg professor think that, as believers, they are fighting a rear guard action. It makes them feel marginal, when in fact it is the media that are increasingly marginal.

There is consolation in the fact that the *Times* is bought by less than one out of twenty people in the New York area, and the audience for television networks and movies has been declining for years. The people in charge know this. But as long as they can indulge their ideological urges and still make big money in a diminished market, they will continue to do what they do. They do damage, of course, but there is no cause for panic. More and more, they are playing defense, as more and more Americans stop taking them seriously. The critical thing is to trust your own experience and not let putative experts convince you that you do not know what you know.

The classic example from the social sciences is "the happy marriage syndrome." From the beginnings of survey research, people have been asked whether theirs is a happy marriage, and what percentage of marriages do they think are happy. With striking consistency, about 75 percent say they are happily married and that only 10 percent of Americans are happily married. The first they know from experience and the second they get from the news. All of the above notwithstanding, I would not be surprised if *Rosemary's Baby* got high ratings on Good Friday. If so, it demonstrates not that ours is a secular society but that, as aforesaid, it is maddeningly confused in its pervasive religiousness. There will always be those in the media who are bent upon offending and are not above exploiting confusion and depravity. But that's no reason to let them, including the old gray madam that is the *Times*, get away with the claim that they represent the real world.

A footnote: later in Holy Week, the federal appeals court in New York discovered a constitutional right to assisted suicide, a discovery promptly hailed in the *Times*' lead editorial (see article by Michael M. Uhlmann beginning on page 39). The big headline announcing the decision said the court "relieves anxiety of physicians." (Nothing was said about the anxiety of patients who may be killed rather than cured.) The Easter edition of the Sunday magazine had a long article on Episcopal bishops ordaining homosexuals, written by gay advocate Bruce Bawer. The lead editorial on Easter Sunday was a ringing endorsement of same-sex "marriage," beginning with the line, "Chances are that Americans will look back thirty years from now and wonder what all the fuss was about." At the rate it is going, chances are that Americans will look back thirty years from now and wonder why anyone paid much attention to the *New York Times*.

FT

WHILE WE'RE AT IT

■ Subscribers by the thousands are found one by one. And sometimes by the dozens. It depends on how many names you send us of family members, friends, and associates who should be reading FT. We'll send them a letter giving you credit for suggesting that we get in touch. One free sample issue has been known to hook people for life. And think of how grateful they will be to you.

■ You might think that one thing all Christians could agree on is that it is a very bad thing for governments to persecute people for being Christians. But then, there are so many things that one might think to be the case. At the end of January, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) put out a strong and eloquent "Statement of Conscience Concerning Worldwide Religious Persecution." The statement and organizing activities around it received a good deal of media attention, and some oldline churches joined in this long-needed initiative. Not, however, the National Council of Churches (NCC). This despite the fact that, looking back on the Cold War, its General Secretary, Joan Brown Campbell, recently confessed to the *Washington Times*, "We did not understand the depth of the suffering of Christians under communism, and we failed to really cry out against the Communist oppression." In February, the Executive Board of the NCC declined to endorse the NAE statement. Speaking on behalf of the NCC, Albert Pennybacker explained that the focus on the persecution of Christians was a "sectarian approach that is not healthy." (In fact, the NAE statement strongly condemns the persecution of believers of any faith.) In addition, Pennybacker expatiated, some regimes have legitimate cultural reasons for opposing Christian proselytism, and some Christians are guilty of resisting the revolutionary measures of so very progressive governments. And on and on. At the same time, the NCC calls for the unification of North and South Korea, without reference to the oppression, including religious oppression, in the North, and condemns sanctions against Cuba, which it blames for the economic disappointments of Fidel's revolution. Worse than failing to cry out, the NCC continues in its historic role as de facto apologist for the persecution of Christians and other believers. That is a hard judgment, to be sure, but it is difficult to reformulate it in a manner that is both kind and accurate. Of course there is the factor that the NCC, which still thinks of itself as the mainline, is loath to associate itself with an initiative coming from those upstart "fundamentalists" in the NAE. But the main thing continues to be that a little religious persecution, or even a lot of religious persecution, must not get in

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the way of support for progressive politics.

■ One thing leads to another. Philip Jenkins has explained in these pages ("The Uses of Clerical Scandal," February) how the several factions in the Catholic Church have exploited the scandal of clerical sex abuse to their own advantage. For instance, the left uses it to agitate for married priests while the right uses it to indict the bishops for general laxity in enforcing orthodox faith and life. As is now generally recognized, both factions collaborated with the press in vastly exaggerating the incidence of such abuses. Nonetheless, court cases may drag on for years, as is now happening with the diocese of Dallas. In the Texas case, plaintiff's lawyers are going for multimillions in damages, and to get that kind of money are claiming that not only the diocese but the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) and its operating arm, the United States Catholic Conference (USCC), are liable for not properly supervising the priests in question. An interesting twist here is that the right, represented by the *Wanderer*, is siding with the lawyers. The *Wanderer* and those of like mind have never had much use for the NCCB, viewing its bureaucracy as a nest of leftist ideologists bent upon reducing the authority of local bishops and resisting the salutary influence of Rome. In the past, conservatives have complained that the NCCB has claimed an authority that it does not rightly possess, that it has spoken and acted in ways that weaken the effectiveness of both local bishops and Rome. In response to the Texas case, however, positions seem to be reversed. The NCCB protests that it cannot be liable since it has no jurisdiction over dioceses and no pastoral responsibility for the actions of individual Catholics or priests. In this case, the NCCB presents itself very modestly indeed, as little more than an institutional arrangement for bishops to get together to talk shop. The Texas lawyers, however, pounce upon past actions and statements of the NCCB in which it appeared to present itself in a considerably more ambitious light. The *Wanderer* cheers the Texas lawyers on, apparently in the hope of scoring a blow against their old adversary, the NCCB and USCC. It is all somewhat unseemly, as these things tend to be. Perhaps good will come of it, though, if bishops conferences are reminded that there are also very practical perils in suggesting that they are the real leadership of the Church. Practical, as in being sued into bankruptcy when something goes wrong over which a bishops conference can have no control. On the point in dispute, the Texas lawyers are wrong, the NCCB is right, and the *Wanderer* should back off. Even in ecclesiastical politics, some vendettas should not be pursued.

■ We'll leave it to Islamic scholars to say whether he got the Qur'an right, but Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf said it forbade him to stand for the national anthem. Abdul-Rauf, the leading scorer for the Denver Nuggets, was for a time suspended for refusing to stand as required by NBA regulations. He did not want to make a public issue of it, and said he was willing to stay in the locker room and come out after the anthem was played. But he would not stand for the anthem. "This is my belief," he said, "and I won't compromise my beliefs." Rather than do that, he said he would give up basketball. One supporter of the NBA suspension declared, "Refusing to stand up and recognize the unity of this nation as embodied under the flag to me is tantamount to treason." Which strikes us as tantamount to fanaticism, if not idolatry. America has easily survived the refusal of Jehovah's Witnesses and others to engage in patriotic rituals, and we expect that neither America nor professional basketball would be done in by anyone's declining to participate in patriotic solemnities. The NBA is not bound by the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, but it and the country are not well served by the suppression of religious freedom. Dissent that is truly conscientious, and not self-serving or willful, is, even when wrongheaded, a rare and valuable commodity in a culture as decadent as ours. The NBA is not a national church, after all. At least not for some of us. The dispute, I should add, seems to have been resolved by Mr. Abdul-Rauf's agreement to stand in silent prayer while the anthem is played.

■ Here's the 282-page volume, *Antisemitism: World Report 1995*. The news is that in the U.S. anti-Semitism continues to be on the decline, as it has been for at least thirty years. As you might expect, developments in some other countries are not so encouraging. The main concern in the U.S. is the influence of Minister Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam among black Americans. The Anti-Defamation League continues to be active on many fronts. Last year it got the *Official Scrabble Player's Dictionary* to remove the previously allowed words "nigger," "spic," "dago," and "jew" (defined as "to bargain with"). Are we really better off when the existence of offensive words is officially denied? Just asking.

■ "Heterosexism is the systemic privileging of heterosexuality and of heterosexual persons." With that definition in place, Louie Crew proceeds to grade the 113 bishops in the Episcopalian House of Bishops who have since 1979 voted on one or more resolutions having do with ordaining homosexuals. Thirty-two bishops get a 100 percent "Hetero Score" and forty-eight get 0 percent, being totally free of any taint of heterosexism. Put differently, forty-eight are supportive of what Crew calls the "lesbigay" agenda and thirty-two opposed. A friend, an Episcopal rector, sends the study along with the note, "For whatever you think it's worth." I'm thinking.

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■ It's no big issue here, except for an unpleasant English fellow by the name of Christopher Hitchens who apparently thinks he is being boldly iconoclastic in slandering Mother Teresa. But in India there is much media ado about her ministry being a cover for the coercive conversion of the dying to Christianity. Donald M. Bishop, a subscriber in Dakha, India, sends us this clipping from the Indian newspaper, the *Telegraph*. A reporter was sent to check out the facts at Nirmal Hriday, Mother Teresa's main house in Calcutta, and discovered that, of the 66,635 people who have been cared for there, 80 percent were Hindu, about 12 percent were Muslim, and the rest were Christian. Moreover, when people die the sisters arrange for funerals according to the rites of their own religion. As aforesaid, it's not a big issue, but in the event someone brings it up we thought you might want to know. Of course Mother Teresa and her sisters make a powerful witness to Christ by word and deed, and we would not be at all surprised if thousands who are listed as Hindu or Muslim came in their last days and hours to know something of the One who inspires and sustains this work of love unqualified. God will register the conversions. Mother Teresa's job is to care.

■ While on the subject, a priest friend says he had the privilege of visiting with the famed Bishop Fulton J. Sheen in the hospital a few days before he died. Sheen was noted for, inter alia, the number of people he had helped bring into the Catholic Church, and our friend, too, was eager to win converts. He asked Sheen for guidance on the matter, noting as an aside that he had already brought thirty-six people into the Church. The venerable bishop raised his head from the pillows, looked at our friend very firmly, and said, "The first thing is to stop counting."

■ While still on the subject, our friend Richard Mouw, President of Fuller Seminary out on the other coast, remembers his favorite childhood experience of a revival meeting. A particularly fiery preacher laid out in vivid terms the absolutely free offer of salvation through the blood of Jesus, and the terribly eternal consequences of refusing the offer. After citing dozens of texts, appealing to every imaginable motivation, and setting forth with many rhetorical flourishes the inexhaustible love of God for sinners, the preacher finally came to his conclusion. He paused briefly, looked sternly at the audience, shrugged his shoulders, and observed, "If you don't say yes tonight, well, all I got to say is you're just a damned fool." Whether this is an approach homiletically recommended at Fuller, Dr. Mouw did not say.

■ Ruth Wells of High Point, North Carolina, is offended, and with justice. A long-standing subscriber and champion of FIRST THINGS, she gets in the mail this letter asking her to become acquainted with the journal. This is an embarrassment that happens from time to time. The reason is that mailing lists used in promotions are supposed to be "purged" of the names of present subscribers, but this purgatorial system does not always work efficiently. If there is even one letter or one punctuation mark that is different, the computer will read it as a different name. Stupid computer. So if you get a letter "introducing" you to your long and best beloved journal, please just pass it on to a friend who may be suffering from FIRST THINGS deprivation.

■ And still his books are coming out in English. The latest from Ignatius Press is Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*. (See Robert L. Wilken's notice in Briefly Noted, May.) This is the first of three on the Greek Fathers; the others deal with Origen and Maximus the Confessor. So why read the thought of the Greek Fathers? asks Balthasar. Certainly not because we can always appropriate their work for modern theological purposes, but for this reason: "We remember it, as a man remembers the profound intuitions he had as an adolescent. If he cannot relive them just as they were, because his situation, his life, indeed, the whole world have changed for him, he can at least fortify himself with the thought that that purity of inspiration, that burning and impatient resonance of his whole being is his very self! We should like to reread a few pages of that intimate journal written by the Church when she was seventeen years old. This we do from the same distance of age but also with the same respectful admiration for the person we once were. It would be a want of taste to desire, when we are forty, to bring laboriously to a conclusion one of those blazing fragments we had carelessly left undone when we were twenty. Youthful fire is not meant to warm up those who are old. We shall not collect the living and sacred documents of our life (and the history of the Church is our life) as a person would collect stamps or butterflies. That would be to demonstrate that we are already dead. Let us read history, our history, as a living account of what we once were, with the double-edged consciousness that all of this has gone forever and that, in spite of everything, that period of youth and every moment of our lives remain mysteriously present at the wellsprings of our soul in a kind of delectable eternity." And that gives you some idea of why so many people are finding in the reading of von Balthasar an intellectually and spiritually delectable present.

■ We didn't need the recent subscriber survey to tell us that some people think FT is too far left and others think it too far right. This is regularly made

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evident in letters received. For instance, the recent reflection in this space on Helmut Schoeck and the role of envy in society drew critical responses from social and cultural conservatives who are nonetheless somewhat to the left on matters economic. I had not sufficiently addressed, they complained, questions such as corporate welfare, the maldistribution of wealth, and the putative fact that, in terms of real income, the middle class has been slipping backward in the last couple of decades. The last point is one that is being pushed hard by Labor Secretary Robert Reich and may be an important part of the Clinton reelection campaign. I am not an economist (as some readers unnecessarily reminded me), but one tries to stay informed. Informative is the word for a recent essay by Karl Zinsmeister of the American Enterprise Institute in Washington. "The idea (promoted by politicians of both the left and the right) that Baby Boomers and Generation Xers are falling from the middle class in great bunches, even trailing behind the living standard of their parents, is, in aggregate, complete rubbish. In 1993, economists Richard Easterlin, Christine Schaeffer, and Diane Macunovich compared the economic status of young Americans with that of their parents. They carefully adjusted for differences in the number and age of family members, took inflation into account, and then calculated income available per adult equivalent. Their results show that today's young families are, on average, about two-thirds better off than their parents were at the same age. Another recent study on this subject by Urban Institute and Congressional Budget Office researchers came up with similar findings: Inflation adjusted pre-tax income per Baby Boomer was 55 percent higher in 1989 than it was for their parents thirty years earlier." The confusion on these matters, writes Zinsmeister, may have less to do with economics in the usual sense of the term than with psychology. "Today's average new house is twice as big as one built after World War II. There are now more registered vehicles in the U.S. than licensed drivers. The average American now consumes literally twice as many goods and services as back in 1950. (In fact, the poorest fifth of the U.S. population today consumes more than the typical family did in 1955.) But Americans take more things for granted today and view as essentials many things that used to be considered luxuries. Because of this, even today's material abundance feels like 'not enough.' Rising expectations aren't necessarily unhealthy, but they do need to be controlled. Our problem today in this area is not so much one of economics as of psychology." Of course there are studies that are counter to those cited by Zinsmeister. That's what experts do, produce studies. And economists have become notoriously partisan in what they decide to find in their findings. So, on this question and others, you look for some reasonable basis for deciding which studies and arguments to credit. Among the factors that ring true in the Zinsmeister approach is one on which the morally concerned, whether of left or right, find common ground. That is the danger of consumerism: the measure of life, indeed the consuming of life, by consumption, the discontent bred by the feeling that yesterday's anticipated enough is never enough. Now I'll brace myself for letters from ardent free marketeers who will instruct me that consumerism is nothing but a bogeyman invented by the enemies of capitalism. They're wrong, too.

■ I've often said that every Christian should try to visit the Holy Land at least once, and I still say that. But people should not expect to be edified by everything they find there. It is not a religious museum or Bible story picture book, but a throbbing, raucous concatenation of peoples, histories, and pieties in frequent conflict. Peter Hawkins of Yale Divinity School writes about his recent visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which is controlled by the Latin Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Armenians, Syrians, and Copts who have been vying with one another for centuries. There you can see the site of the crucifixion and burial, and check out the Angel's Chapel, which supposedly contains the stone on which the angel sat who announced the resurrection to the frightened women. The churches in charge have their allotted places and times, and keep a close eye on the clock. "Each group must stick firmly to schedule or, as happened during one of my visits, a kind of backlog of devotion can build up: foot-tapping Armenians were stalled behind impatient Greeks as an overflow of Copts intoned their prayers in apparent obliviousness of the traffic jam. On a busy Sunday the air is especially torn by discord, with different liturgical languages competing for the loudest as well as the last word. Upstaging is all. And so the Armenians clang the bells of their upstairs chapel, the Franciscan organist eggs on the Latin chanting of his flock, and Ethiopian monks march to the beat of their own drummer. The whole building seems hopelessly botched, the atmosphere nothing less than exhausting." Mr. Hawkins was not sure why he kept returning to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, "but I think what really drew me back was the sense that if I spent enough time there I would come closer to whatever it was that drew the pilgrim Egeria eastward across the Mediterranean and that, centuries later, convinced thousands of Crusaders to kill and be killed. I would figure out why everyone, me included, has wanted a piece of this action." In the Christian view of things, it was right here—well, maybe not *right* here, but within a small stone's toss this way or that—that humanity's redemption was accomplished, and there is no place comparable in the whole wide world.

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■ In *Theological Studies* a Jesuit who to the best of my knowledge I have never met reviews Ian Markham's excellent book *Plurality and Christian Ethics* (see FT discussion, "Truth and Tolerance," October 1994). He is somewhat sympathetic to Markham's argument but devotes most of the review to regretting that Markham has fallen under the bad influence of Richard John Neuhaus. The reviewer explains that Neuhaus is very polemical and resists "dialogue" with those who do not agree with him on everything. This I am sorry to learn about myself. Certainly it will come as a surprise to the sundry Jews, Catholics, evangelical Protestants, liberal Protestants, and agnostics (and maybe an atheist or two) whom our institute's programs regularly engage in civil argument. The variety of persons and views engaged, I confidently expect, is far greater than what might be found at a Jesuit seminary in Berkeley where academics churn out reviews unhindered by acquaintance with their subject. Dismissiveness of those who do not toe the familiar line likely has something to do with confidence in one's own position, or the lack thereof. Especially in the academy, those who constituted and still do largely constitute the establishment are running scared. Not all of them, of course. Some still don't know that they are living in the backwaters of American religious and intellectual life. There are other interesting twists in this connection. A professor at a major Catholic institution where I used to speak from time to time when I was a Lutheran recently said that he had tried and failed to have me invited for a lectureship. He explained, "When we invited you before, it was ecumenical. Now it's controversial." Ah well, one has long since learned to live with these nervous tics. But it is a shame that Ian Markham should be unfairly reviewed for the polemical company that he keeps. I do hope that these remarks are not unduly polemical. And if ever I have the pleasure of meeting the reviewer in question I am prepared to dialogue him to death. So to speak.

■ For biologists, 1995 was a banner year, marked by the first discovery in decades of a whole new kind of animal life. The new *Cycliphora* phylum is represented by its one newly found member species, *Symbion pandora*, a retiring and modest little creature who—until scientists dragged it forth to an unwanted notoriety—kept the noiseless tenor of its way on the mouth parts of the Norwegian lobster. What exactly the discovery means, I'm not prepared to say, apart from registering my approval of any name as effervescent as *Symbion pandora*. But the *Lancet* has proved less hesitant. Prompted perhaps by the "pandora" part of the name, the famous British medical journal uses the discovery as an occasion for a New Year's editorial on the reality of evil: "To deny the possible existence of evil," the editors declare, "is as scientifically arrogant as claiming that no new phylum of living things could be discovered." Lest you think, however, that the *Lancet*—in decrying scientific arrogance—may be ready to turn to religion, the editorial continues with a plaint about the lack of funding for scientific research into evil. "All we can hope for is serendipity—that a scientist as inquisitive as the one looking in the lobster's mouth and marvelling at *S pandora* will come across evil, maybe from the preserved brains of those afflicted. . . . Should that happen, evil will be classifiable and may even prove reversible." One wants to say . . . well, there is so much one wants to say in response to this sort of touchingly naive faith in the miraculous powers of science. But you've read it all before in these pages, and no doubt will read it all again. For now, let's just register a doubt that 1996 will prove a banner year for people seeking to scientifically classify and reverse evil.

■ When in 1993 he died at the age of nearly ninety, Hans Jonas was full of years and honors, although not as many honors as his work warranted. Leon Kass writes in tribute to Jonas and his book *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (University of Chicago Press). That book changed Kass's life and helped move him toward his own remarkable work in bringing together science, medicine, and a philosophy worthy of human beings, as in his own *Toward a More Natural Science*. Along the way, Kass cites this from the introduction to *The Phenomenon of Life*: "A philosophy of life comprises the philosophy of the organism and the philosophy of mind. This is itself a first proposition of the philosophy of life, in fact its hypothesis, which it must make good in the course of execution. For the statement of scope expresses no less than the contention that the organic even in its lowest forms prefigures mind, and that mind even on its highest reaches remains part of the organic. The latter half of the contention, but not the former, is in tune with modern belief; the former, but not the latter, was in tune with ancient belief: that *both* are valid and inseparable is the hypothesis of a philosophy that tries for a stand beyond the quarrel of the ancients and the moderns." Jonas was not a Christian, but one is struck by how very much this argument that both are valid and inseparable is at the heart of classic Christian thought regarding the resurrection of the body. In a 1989 interview published in the same issue of the *Hastings Center Report* in which Kass's tribute appears, Jonas said that his purpose was to examine "in precise philosophical and metaphysical terms the ultimate bases of morality and human destiny." "The religious person," he said, "doesn't need to undertake this examination, but I deem it necessary to make ethics independent of any given religious credo." Then a statement that is poignant in its ambition to achieve the probably impossible: "Our

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duties and responsibilities as human beings must be shown to be so incontrovertible that even atheists must recognize them. There *are* ultimate taboos." We can say it again and again, we can assert it in tones persuasively seductive, we can pound the table and plead and threaten and vividly describe the consequences of denying it, but at the end of the day there will always be those who controvert incontrovertible moral truth. About which little is to be done except to say it again, only this time more convincingly. Few have persisted in saying it so well as Hans Jonas.

■ A reader says she is shocked, simply shocked, that I apparently read a notoriously sensationalist paper called *Christian News*. In fact, one of our staff is an incorrigible gossipmonger and brings items of interest to my attention. Anyway, the paper runs a regular section titled "Neuhaus Watch" and it's hard to resist. For instance, there is this on the book *Evangelicals and Catholics Together:* "The crafty Neuhaus hopes to form an alliance between the Neo-Evangelicals in Protestantism and the moderate Neo-orthodox in Romanism. This will ultimately result in pushing a large chunk of Evangelicalism into union with Rome." Horrors. Put differently, it will push Rome into union with a large chunk of Evangelicalism. If it is the Holy Spirit that is doing the pushing, and if union is union in the truth, it strikes uncrafty me as the unity for which Our Lord prayed.

■ It is hardly surprising that self-confessed misanthrope Florence King has a liking for that great hater of humanity Ambrose Bierce, who got lost and apparently died in Mexico in 1914. Bierce is noted for, among other things, writing one of the shortest and most lethal of book reviews: "The covers of this book are too far apart." Ms. King also does not like a new book on Bierce by Roy Morris. She says Morris doesn't understand the first thing about misanthropes. For instance, he is puzzled that Bierce defended persecuted minorities of his day—Mormons and Chinese coolies—while despising human beings. "Mr. Morris does not understand how misanthropes think," says King. "It's simply that minorities contain fewer people than majorities: To a misanthrope this is important."

■ *Biblical Ethics in Medicine* is a small quarterly edited from an evangelical Protestant viewpoint but of potentially wider interest. For information, write Box 13231, Florence, SC 29504.

■ The identification line says that Donna Minkowitz "has written for the *Village Voice, Ms.*, and *Christianity in Crisis.*" Actually, that was *Christianity and Crisis*, and its authorial connection with those other publications explains in part why it went belly up a couple of years ago. In any event, Ms. Minkowitz is reviewing in the *Nation* a rash of evangelical novels, including ones by Pat Robertson and Frank Peretti, as well as Charles Colson's *Gideon's Torch*. The others, she says predictably, are junk, but she likes apocalyptic stories and has a grudging affection for Colson's book, despite his being, she says, so nasty to the homosexual movement. Colson appreciates the ambiguities built into human behavior. Ms. Minkowitz concludes with this twist on the dialectic of sin and grace. "I may be giving Colson more credit than he's due, but his compassionate, deluded, wise, and ridiculous right-wing book makes me want to err in that direction. In his apocalypse, everyone is on the chopping block, and everyone is to be pitied. For all his wrong positions and casual bigotry, it's a vision I can respect. Perhaps more precisely, it makes me want to put Colson through ungodly tortures for his homophobia, then forgive and pity him."

■ A stuffed finch was discovered in a dusty crate in the basement of the Museum of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia. No ordinary stuffed finch, this. It was tagged by nobody less than Charles Darwin. *Time* magazine reports the excited yet reverent words of Darwin scholars in response to the great find. Clearly, for them it is a religious relic to be venerated. I'm sorry, it is not nice to mock the superstitions of simple believers.

■ The House of Representatives has voted to honor Billy Graham and his wife, Ruth, with the Congressional Gold Medal for their service to the country. The medal has been bestowed about one hundred times in the history of the U.S. The House vote was 403-2, and it will now be considered by the Senate. Louise Slaughter (D., N.Y.) said she voted no by mistake. The other no vote was Pat Schroeder (D., Colo.), who has announced she is retiring this year. Getting in her last spiteful shots, it seems.

■ Conor Cruise O'Brien is an odd one, as readers know who have followed comments in these pages on his intellectual peregrinations. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation invited him to deliver the distinguished Massey Lectures, which have now appeared in a little book, *On the Eve of the Millennium: The Future of Democracy Through an Age of Unreason* (Free Press). Reviewing the book in *Commentary*, our George Weigel notes that O'Brien is one of the last true believers in "the Enlightenment," and maintaining that faith is no doubt made easier by his refusal to define "the Enlightenment" to which he is devoted, except that it has a great deal more to do with Voltaire than with Burke. Weigel writes: "Avoiding the really hard questions, O'Brien's Massey Lectures are replete with what cigar-makers call 'filler': ill-informed cracks about American presidential politics; typically dismissive liberal clichés about a somnambulant Ronald Reagan; a strange obsession

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with the Clinton Administration's 'Operation Restore Democracy' in Haiti. But O'Brien really loses his grip in the matter of Pope John Paul II, to whose purported wickedness he dedicates the first of his lectures. O'Brien begins with a frankly apocalyptic charge: the Pope has created a 'Rome-Riyadh axis' in order to unite 'the religious of the world . . . for a final victory over the irreligious.' As evidence for this plot to inaugurate a new Dark Age, O'Brien adduces the World Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in September 1994. There, the Vatican played a major role in defeating the plans of the Clinton Administration and its allies to increase the coercive power of the state in family planning and sex education throughout the world. For O'Brien, who openly claims to 'abhor' Pope John Paul II and who admits to praying daily for his immediate demise, Cairo signified something very ominous. It seems the last half of the second millennium has been 'a time of disaster for the Catholic Church.' But now the Church will have its revenge: through the machinations of the Pope, official Catholicism has forged a tactical alliance with Islamic fundamentalism in order to roll back, and then rout, the Enlightenment heritage. To this end, the Pope is 'not averse to giving hints' that he himself 'might . . . in the year 2000 announce his acceptance of the Qur'an and summon the faithful, through the papal *muezzin*, to join him in prayer at the Mosque of St. Peter.' Such fevered inanities, which would be dismissed as the ravings of a madman had they issued from the likes of the Reverend Jimmy Swaggart, suggest why O'Brien is a poor guide to understanding the millennium now closing, or to assaying the human and democratic prospect beyond the year 2000."

■ How sharper than a serpent's tooth is a wannabe advertiser scorned. We don't really go in for scorn, but we do reject some ads. "ABORTION IS MURDER!!!" "EVOLUTION: THE TEACHING OF SATAN!" "TEN WAYS TO SEX WITHOUT LIMITS!" Of course we discriminate. Editing is another word for discrimination. Some are close calls. Those discriminated against can resort to less fastidious publications to spread the word that FIRST THINGS is not pro-life, or supports evolution, or is against sex. We plead innocent on all counts. The parlous finances that come with publishing a journal such as this put us in no position to reject advertising income lightly. But it's a matter, if not of principle, at least of taste. Those who don't have it are not likely to understand. Capitalized headings with exclamation points, never mind multiple exclamation points, usually come in for close scrutiny. In any event, we trust discerning readers to know that the rejection of an ad does not mean that we reject what may be the good intention behind the ad. As you may have had occasion to notice in your own experience, it's not always easy to keep everybody happy, no matter how inoffensive one tries to be. And goodness knows we try.

■ Disrupting the accustomed course of his many good ideas, my friend William F. Buckley has deep within him this libertarian child who occasionally gets out to advocate the legalization of drugs. He recently took over an issue of *National Review* to plug the argument once again. This journal has an editorial position on legalizing drugs (against) which we will not repeat here. I did, however, come across this article by Joseph Califano, health and welfare secretary under Jimmy Carter, who is clearly upset by Mr. Buckley's view. I will not repeat all of his argument, but his comment on the analogy drawn with the prohibition of alcohol is of possible interest: "FACT: This [analogy] ignores two important distinctions: Prohibition was in fact decriminalization (possession of alcohol for personal consumption was not illegal); and alcohol, unlike illegal drugs such as heroin and cocaine, has a long history of broad social acceptance dating back to the Old Testament and Ancient Greece. Nevertheless, alcohol consumption dropped from 1.96 gallons per person in 1919 to 0.97 gallons per person in 1934, the first full year after Prohibition ended. Death rates from cirrhosis among men came down from 29.5 per 100,000 in 1911 to 10.7 per 100,000 in 1929. During Prohibition, admission to mental health institutions for alcohol psychosis dropped 60 percent; arrests for drunk and disorderly conduct went down 50 percent; welfare agencies reported significant declines in cases due to alcohol-related family problems, and the death rate from impure alcohol did not rise. Nor did Prohibition generate a crime wave. Homicide increased at a higher rate between 1900 and 1910 than during Prohibition, and organized crime was well established in the cities before 1920. I put these facts on the record not to support a return to Prohibition, which I strongly oppose, but to set the historical record straight and temper the revisionist view of legalizers who take their history from celluloid images of 1930s gangster movies."

■ The hysterical Frank Rich, whose column in the *Times* almost makes one miss the relative sobriety of Anna Quindlen, has been sounding the tocsin against those Christian fanatics who think same-sex "marriage" a bad idea. Mr. Rich was gratified, indeed exultant, over the box office success of *The Birdcage*, noting that the same weekend it opened a Robert Redford movie about a heterosexual love affair did not do nearly so well. His point, if we read him aright, is that Americans prefer homosexual unions over heterosexual. John Podhoretz, writing in the *Weekly Standard*, was not so taken with the American remake of the hilarious French hit *La Cage aux Folles*. "*The Birdcage* is about a drag queen

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who hardly ever dresses in drag, believes in family values, and never touches his live-in lover of twenty-plus years. These plot points are essential to the movie's commercial prospects; indeed, *The Birdcage* is going to make a lot of money because of its boundless hypocrisy. It preaches tolerance while having a good laugh at the expense of two mincing, shrieking, weeping male caricatures of women. It preaches understanding but refuses to show us any questionable sexual or physical behavior that might make understanding a bit more difficult. The only consistent target of its animus is a politically conservative U.S. Senator who is cofounder of a group called Coalition for Moral Order. It's acceptable to dress up in women's clothes and have pornographic statuary around your house, director Mike Nichols and screenwriter Elaine May are telling us; it's quite another thing to oppose abortion and think women should stay at home with their children." Far from being an indicator of social acceptance of homosexuality, a movie such as *The Birdcage*—sanitized of what homosexuals actually do with their plumbing, and of grim specters such as AIDS—is a very traditional instance of people finding homosexual behavior, especially in its more flamboyant cross-dressing variations, ludicrously funny. Sprinkling the dialogue with liberal bromides protects the makers from the accurate charge of producing the gay equivalent of a blackface minstrel show. One might think that more astute gay activists would be picketing the film. On the other hand, they may be betting on Alexander Pope's progression of human responses: "Vice is a monster of so frightful mien, / As to be hated needs but to be seen; / Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face, / We first endure, then pity, then embrace." It is an open question as to whether the outcome is different if the first lines read: "Vice is a spectacle of so ludicrous mien, / As to be laughed at needs but to be seen." However that may be, it is a very dubious business to draw large social implications from the fact that a few million people thought *The Birdcage* very amusing.

■ Even Mother Teresa has her unguarded moments. In an unusually open-ended interview, the subject turned to Princess Diana, whom Mother Teresa has befriended. In the April issue of *Ladies' Home Journal*, Mother Teresa is quoted as saying: "I think it is a sad story. She (Diana) is such a sad soul. She gives so much love, but she needs to get it back. You know what? It is good that it is over. Nobody was happy anyhow. I know I should preach for family love and unity, but in their case . . . ," and then her voice trailed off. After the appearance of the interview, Mother Teresa issued a clarification, noting that the advocacy of divorce "is clearly against Catholic teachings and my own convictions." "I have never advised or encouraged a husband and wife to seek divorce. I always tell couples having trouble to pray—alone and together as a family." The clarification has been widely published in Catholic circles, but it will probably have a hard time catching up with all the people who read the *Ladies' Home Journal* interview.

■ If you were to call a conference on "The Family, Civil Society, and the State" and you had your pick of speakers, you would want to include Mary Ann Glendon, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Michael Medved, Gertrude Himmelfarb, David Blankenhorn, and Robert Casey. That is precisely the conference scheduled for June 21-22 in Washington, D.C. For more information, call (414) 288-6841 or fax (414) 288-3360.

■ There was an item in the paper the other day about Common Ground, the effort by pro-life and pro-choice people to find ways to work together to help women in crisis pregnancies and, more generally, to lower the level of public invective. Not surprisingly, those engaged in such efforts are viewed with some suspicion by their colleagues on all sides of this great dispute. In this *Wall Street Journal* article a pro-life participant in Common Ground is quoted as saying that progress has been made. It seems the pro-choicers no longer call the pro-lifers "terrorists" and the pro-lifers no longer call the pro-choicers "baby killers." Excuse me, but the symmetry seems somewhat less than symmetrical. The pro-life people participating in Common Ground are not and never were terrorists, while, as a matter of simple fact, the pro-choice people do kill or support the killing of babies. That does not mean that they should publicly be called baby killers, but Common Ground is purchased at too high a price if it requires the denial of what the dispute is about in the first place.

■ Of Mark Gerson's very fine work *The Neoconservative Vision* (Madison Books), the reviewer in the *Wall Street Journal* had this to say: "According to orthodoxy, the neoconservatives were a handful of former leftists and Trotskyists whose opposition to Stalinism evolved into a full-throated objection to utopianism in all its forms. Since the 1970s, though, their ranks have swelled to the point where anyone can be a neocon if he or she agrees with Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, Hilton Kramer, or Richard John Neuhaus at least four days a week. Of course, even these four eminences don't agree on what neoconservatism is." I don't know about those other eminences, but around here five days of unqualified agreement is required for the neocon membership badge. In truth, I expect most of us agree with Irving Kristol that it's time to retire the term "neoconservative." We're just a bunch of intellectuals who, by various routes, have come to similarly conservative dispositions. On the other hand, the very sharp Mr. Gerson might say that such a demurrer is precisely a characteristic of neocons,

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and maybe he's right. There's really no point to this item, other than that I did not want to ignore the one and only time that "eminence" will be associated with my name. It does have a nice ring to it.

■ Through thick and thin, when mainline Protestantism was the path of upward mobility and, later, a term of derision, Martin E. Marty has stayed with the assertion that he is a mainline Protestant. He is also senior editor of the *Christian Century*, and he expects that at century's turn people will be commenting on the presumptuous name of that worthy publication. "These laughers and taunters will be unoriginal: the jeers have been jeered before at those who could name anything 'the *Christian Century*.'" Marty goes on to defend the founders and maybe lay a bit of a guilt trip on the rest of us. He writes that "most of the namers of this periodical and their successors had early second thoughts as bad things began to happen, among them world wars, depressions, and Christian rightists' efforts to name America a Christian country. Yes, our founders *were* progressivists, and foolishly hopeful. A mark of our sad century is this: the best thing we have to do now is to make fun of people who, as recently as a century ago, still hoped." Ouch? Not really. First: Were Reinhold Niebuhr and other notables making fun of hope when, already fifty years ago, they derided the *Century's* sentimental optimism? I think not. They were trying to rescue the credibility of hope from the indulgence of naivete. Second: It is not simply that Marty's editorial ancestors were, as he calls them, "foolishly hopeful." They were smugly arrogant, masters of the teaching of contempt toward those who were on the other side of the "modernist" vs. "fundamentalist" wars of the early part of this century. (Is there still a hint of that in the listing of "rightist" religious efforts right up there with the horrors of world wars and depressions?) Third: The time of hope is hardly past. Christians, here and elsewhere, still hope. They evince a vibrant confidence that, as we cross the threshold of the Third Millennium, we may be entering upon the greatest era of evangelization in all of Christian history. Of course these Christians are not mainline Protestants. They are, with exceptions, Catholics, evangelical Protestants, and, in some places, Orthodox. They have never heard of the *Christian Century* and don't have time to make fun of the progressivist delusions of the past. Admittedly, a few of us still take the time occasionally. For old time's sake. And because some of those delusions are not yet past. I confess that Marty's charge caused, if not a twinge of guilt, at least the intimation that maybe I should feel a twinge of guilt. But, happily, that did not survive a moment's thought.

■ Matthew Berke asks, "To whom are we supposed to send these sample issues?"

Sources: *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany* by Joel F. Harrington, reviewed in *Times Literary Supplement*, February 23, 1996. Adam Wolfson on Berger and Neuhaus, *Crisis*, March 1996. Michael Wood on John Updike, *New York Review of Books*, February 29, 1996. Richard P. McBrien on Catholic orthodoxy, *National Catholic Reporter*, February 9, 1996. Andrew Sullivan on gay rights, *New Republic*, March 18, 1996. On Episcopalian heresy case, *New York Times*, March 21, 1996. *New York Times* television guide, March 31, 1996.

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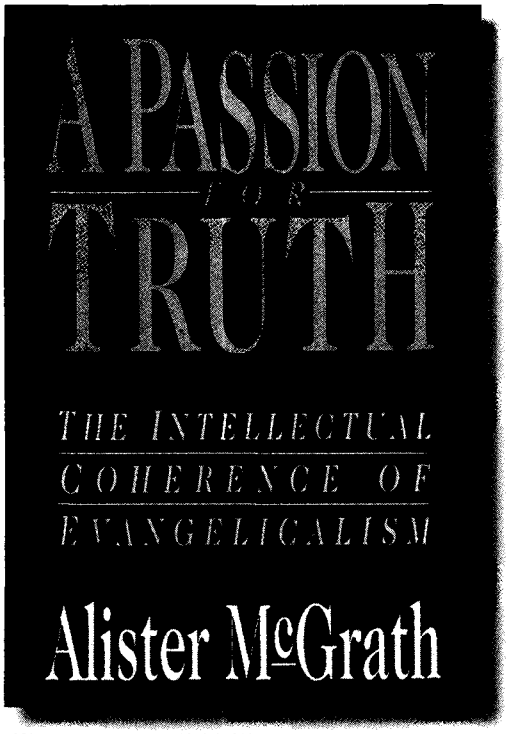

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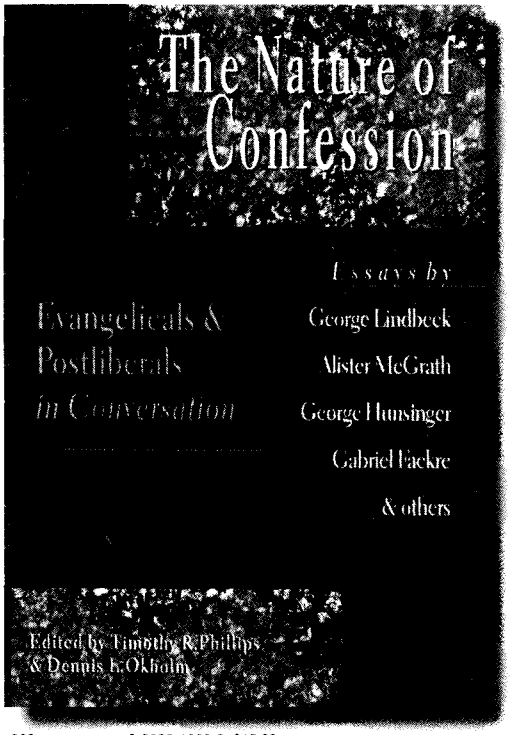

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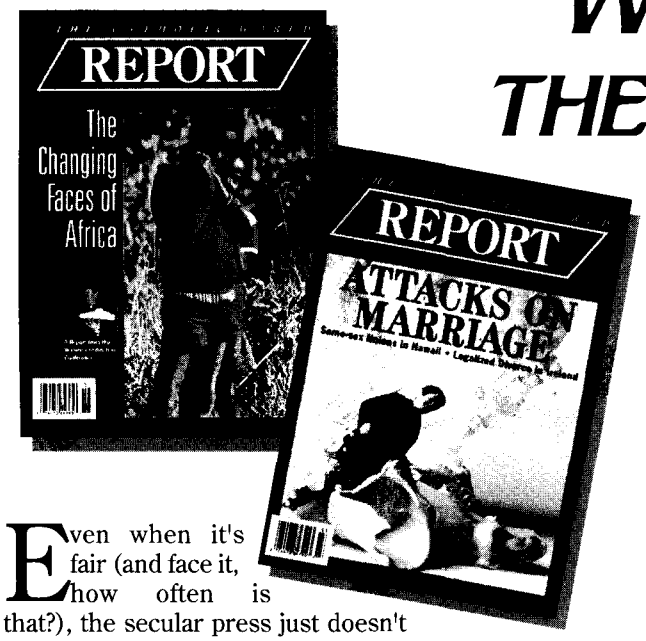

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